FREE DLC WORTH £6

NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR
THE PENINSULAR CAMPAIGN

RATED 84%

PC GAMER

WORLD OF WARCRAFT
Revealed: sexy new panda secrets.

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

COUNTER-STRIKE
GLOBAL OFFENSIVE

Revealed: Valve's shot at Call of Duty's crown

SCOOP!

SECRETS OF SIMCITY!

Robot dinosaurs! And roads!

E-sports gone wrong!

INTRODUCING THE PCG LOLYMPICS

EXTRA LIFE

- WORLD OF TANKS ON TRIAL
- REVEALED: THE PC'S BEST STAR WARS GAME
- MAKE YOUR OWN SKYRIM MOD
- MASSIVE PC MONITORS TESTED

UK Edition » Issue 239 £6.49 OUTSIDE UK & EIRE PRINTED IN THE UK
MAY 2012 UK £5.99
PCGAMER.com Future MEDIA WITH PASSION
9 771470 169009 05>

THE BEST NEW GAMES

PLANETSIDE 2
GHOST RECON ONLINE
TRIBES: ASCEND
LEAGUE OF LEGENDS
MS FLIGHT

© 2012 Activision Publishing, Inc. Activision and Prototype are registered trademarks of Activision Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. '', 'PlayStation', 'PS3', 'PSP' and '' are trademarks or registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. 'PS3' is a trademark of the same company. KINECT, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft. All other trademarks and trade names are the properties of their respective owners. All rights reserved.
* Release date for Xbox 360® and PlayStation®3 only.

[PROTOTYPE® 2]

WELCOME TO NEW YORK ZERO!

PROTOTYPE 2® takes the unsurpassed carnage of Radical Entertainment's original best-selling open-world game of 2009 - PROTOTYPE and delivers the most over-the-top action game of 2012. Cut a path through the viral wastelands of NYZ and build up a vast genetic arsenal as you hunt, kill and consume your way towards your ultimate goal... destroying Alex Mercer!

'Puts god-like super powers in the palm of your hands.'
-IGN

facebook.com/prototype • prototypegame.com

AVAILABLE 24.04.2012*

WorldMags.net

Call 0800 316 3552

YouTube

* Open to new learners only and cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer. Offer is not valid when purchasing PDI lessons. BSM reserve the right to vary, amend, or withdraw this offer at any time. BSM tuition is subject to instructor availability. BSM driving instructors are self-employed franchisees and all contracts for the provision of tuition are between pupil and instructor.

BSM
bsm.co.uk

WorldMags.net

PC GAMER®

#239 MAY 2012

Future Publishing Ltd
30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW **Tel** 01225 442244
Fax 01225 732275 **Email** pcgamer@futurenet.com
Web www.pcgamer.com

EDITORIAL
Editor Tim Edwards
Deputy Editor Graham Smith
Production Editor Tony Ellis
Section Editor Tom Francis
Web Editor Owen Hill
Art Editor John Strike
Deputy Art Editor Cliff Newman
Staff Writer Rich McCormick
Interns Tom Senior, Chris Thursten

CONTRIBUTORS
Tim Stone, Adam Oxford, Richard Cobbett, Duncan Geere, Jon Blyth, Phil Savage, Dan Griliopoulos, David Lyttleton, Marsh Davies, Steve Hogarty, Chris Donlan, Kim Richards, Rose Brandle, Henry Winchester, Matthew Lees, Nick Aspell, Edward Major, Julian Benson, Evan Lahti
Photography Future Photography Studio, www.istockphoto.com
Group Art Editor Graham Dalzell
Creative Director Robin Abbott
Editorial Director Jim Douglas
Sales Director Nick Weatherall

ADVERTISING
Advertisement Manager Emma Cull
London Sales Director Malcolm Stoodley
Entertainments Sales Director Rob Elms
Digital Advertising Manager Andrew Church
Account Manager David Priestman
Account Manager Rachel Sinclair
Account Manager Chris Brown

MARKETING
Brand Marketing Manager James Kick

CIRCULATION/TRADE MARKETING
Trade Marketing Manager Matt Cooper

PRINT & PRODUCTION
Production Coordinator Roberta Lealand

LICENSING
Head of International Licensing Tim Hudson

FUTURE PUBLISHING LIMITED
Group Publishing Director Simon Maxwell
Publisher Richard Keith

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Phone our UK hotline on 0844 848 2852
Phone our International hotline on +44 (0) 1604 251045
Subscribe online at www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk
To view your account details/status and to change your address, please go to www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/youraccount

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE... **MAY 9**

Printed in the UK by William Gibbons on behalf of Future. Distributed in the UK by Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT. Tel: 0207 429 4000

Want to work for Future?
Visit www.futurenet.com/jobs

abc A member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations
23,562
January-December 2011

Future Publishing Ltd is part of Future plc. Future produces carefully targeted special-interest magazines, websites and events for people who share a passion.
We publish more than 170 magazines and websites and 100 international editions of our titles are published across the world. Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR). www.futureplc.com
Non-executive Chairman Peter Allen
Tel +44 (0)1225 442244

PC GAMER is Future Publishing Limited's registered trademark. All rights reserved. © Future Publishing Ltd. 2011. No part of this magazine may be used or reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. The registered office of Future Publishing Limited is at Beauford Court, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. All information contained in this magazine is for informational purposes only and is, to the best of our knowledge, correct at the time of going to press. Future Publishing Limited cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies that occur. Readers are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers direct with regard to pricing. All submissions to PC Gamer are made on the basis of a licence to publish the submission in PC Gamer magazine, its associated websites and all world-wide licensed editions of the same. Any material submitted is sent at the owner's risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future Publishing Limited nor its agents shall be liable for loss or damage.

We encourage you to recycle this magazine, either through your usual household recyclable waste collection service or at a recycling site.

recycle
When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

Talk to PC Gamer
Have your say! Join our forum at *www.pcgamer.com/forum*

Drop the bomb

This month is all about nostalgia. Forgive me for indulging mine. I was at university when *Counter-Strike* started to gain traction, playing online with a 56K modem, on the Barrysworld and Gameplay servers. I miss that time.

I miss the all-night LAN parties, the endless supply of caffeine in cans, the breaks to play *Diablo 2* and *Action Half-Life*, and abusing the internal phone system to bodge a VOIP network. I remember the first maps – one was a house you had to enter via a dark and dreary sewer. I remember hiding in that sewer for hours, waiting for passing CTs.

I remember the hilarious night when vehicles were added that could carry multiple passengers. I spent most of that evening taking scout shots at the drivers.

There's an argument that says *Counter-Strike* was the most important PC game of all time: without *Counter-Strike* there would be no Steam, and probably no *Call of Duty*. So Valve's return to de_dust is worth investigating. We find a team caught between two strong and conflicting demands: to remake the past, and to fulfil the near impossible expectations of a declining community.

The reboot of *SimCity* by Maxis evokes similar levels of nostalgia. But I think what Maxis are doing is oddly forward-thinking. The tech they're using to power the sim side of *SimCity* is remarkable, but it remains true to what *SimCity* should be about: the geeky pleasure of graphs moving in the right direction.

Apparently, there's some form of sporting competition taking place in the UK this summer. In its honour, we held our own PC gaming octathlon. You may want to avert your eyes.

Tim Edwards

TIM EDWARDS
EDITOR
tim.edwards@futurenet.com
@hanknova

BRINGING YOU THE SCOOPS THIS MONTH...

Tom Francis
@pentadact
Took his game to San Francisco. Made lots of friends. Gave 'pretty good' hugs to game developers.

Graham Smith
@gonnas
Needs to cut his beard back. Dramatically. "But I like that I can hide small animals in it," he says.

Rich McCormick
@richmcc
Introduced his real girlfriend to his *Mass Effect 3* girlfriend. "She talks funny." "*You* talk funny."

Chris Thursten
@cthursten
Went to California to meet *World of Warcraft*'s Pandarians. How was it? "Bamboozling."

WorldMags.net

9000

CONTENTS

#239 MAY 2012

MONITOR

8 » **Top Story** *MechWarrior Online* stomps forth.
12 » **The Spy** Deniable gossip.
14 » **Face Off** Should everything be skippable?
16 » **Incoming!**
18 » **Special Report** Six exciting ideas from GDC.
22 » **World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria**
26 » **PlanetSide 2**
28 » **Sniper Elite V2**
30 » **Dungeonland**
32 » **The Showdown Effect**
34 » **End of Nations**

FEATURES

40 » **Counter-Strike: Global Offensive**
46 » **Interview: Valve** Chet, Erik and Doug speak.
48 » **Ghost Recon Online** Slick free-to-play shooter.
52 » **SimCity** It's back, and it's nerdy again.
56 » **The Lolympics** We test our PC gaming skills.

PC GAMER NETWORK

70 » **SEND** Your emails answered, or mocked.
74 » **PLAY** Play with us, and people who read us.
76 » **WIN!** A £1,000 *Civ V* PC by inventing a religion.

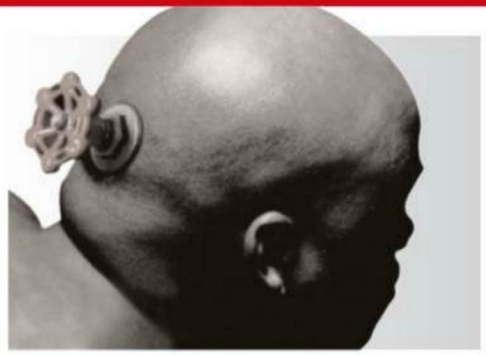
40 CS: GLOBAL OFFENSIVE

"It got me excited again about a game I've been playing for 13 years"

HIGHLIGHTS

22 MISTS OF PANDARIA

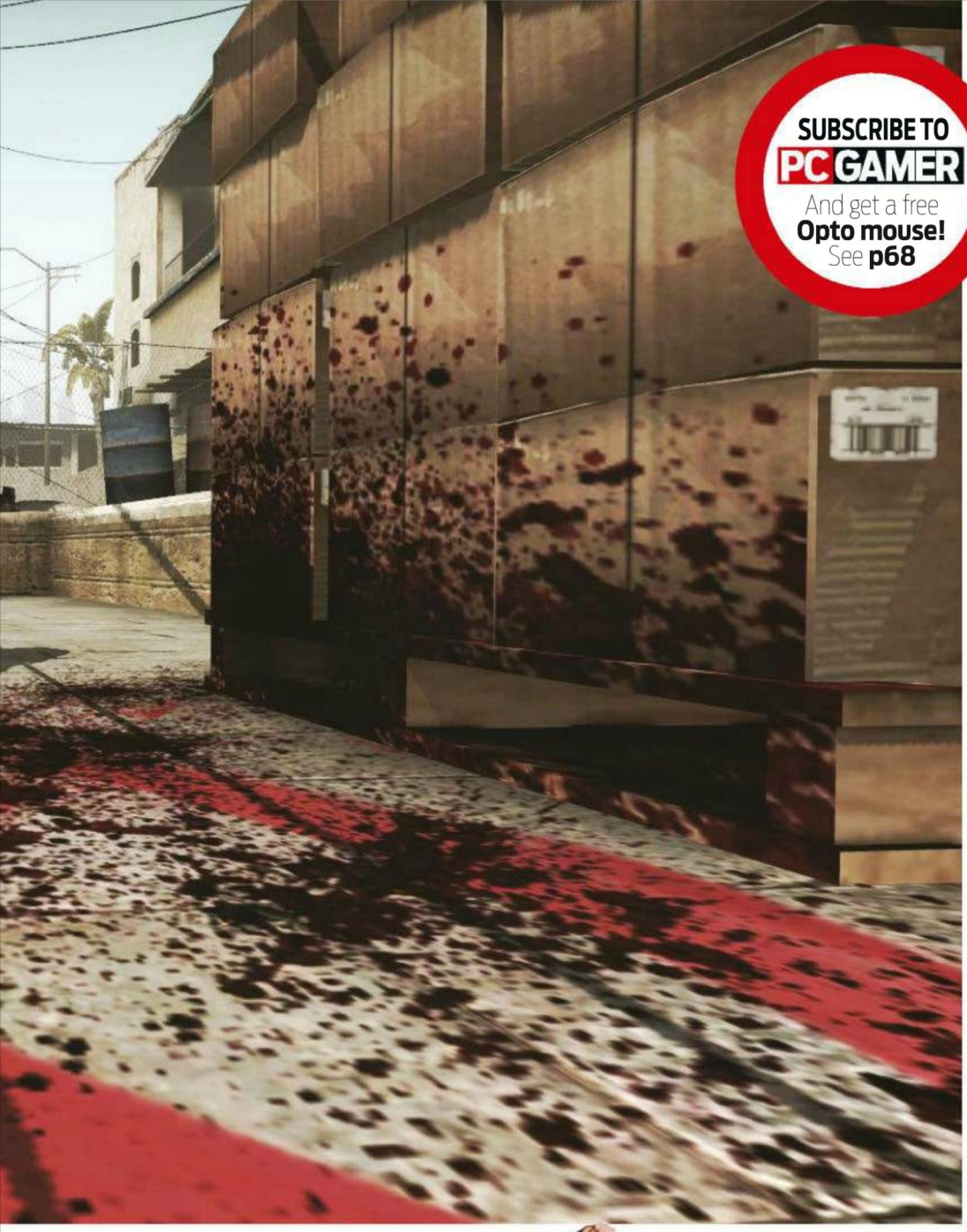
A new nation to explore, a siege on Orgrimmar, and tank battles between continents. Pandaria sets out to be *World of Warcraft*'s most spectacular chapter, one with a new focus on the endgame.



46 THE VALVE INTERVIEW

Are Valve working on a secret 'Steam Box' living room PC? Will the Steam Workshop let modders sell their work? How do you get a job at Valve? We chat to Chet, Erik, Doug and Jay to find out.

WorldMags.net



SUBSCRIBE TO PC GAMER
And get a free **Opto mouse!**
See **p68**

REVIEWS

80 » Tribes: Ascend
86 » PixelJunk Eden
87 » Mortal Kombat Kollection
87 » Starpoint Gemini
88 » Wakfu
90 » MUD: FIM Motocross
92 » Rayman Origins
94 » Realm of the Mad God
96 » Mass Effect 3
102 » MS Flight
104 » Vessel
105 » Snuggle Truck
105 » Titan Attacks
106 » League of Legends
110 » Victoria II: A House Divided
111 » JULIA
111 » Really Big Sky
112 » 1000 Amps
113 » Crazy Machine Elements
113 » Scoregasm
114 » They're Back

The Hard Stuff

117 » Adam Oxford explains and reviews the latest in PC gaming technology, including Alienware's console-sized **X51** PC, Steel's excellent new **mechanical keyboard**, a round up of the best **flatpanel monitors** around, and an in-depth look at the public beta of **Windows 8** from a gamer's perspective.

EXTRA LIFE

130 » **NOW PLAYING**
Why Rich was squealing throughout our *Tribes: Ascend* match, and Owen's love of trains.

134 » **TOP 10 DOWNLOADS**
Tie a rope between two spaceships in co-op, and more free gems.

138 » **UPDATE**
The French have invaded *World of Tanks*. Do their deathboxes hold up?

140 » **HOW TO**
Create a vast hag in *Skyrim*, and share her on the Steam Workshop.

142 » **REINSTALL**
Chris Thursten has to repeat a year at the *Jedi Academy*.

144 » **MUST PLAY**
The greatest games on PC right now.

52 SIMCITY

One of the PC's most beloved classics is finally returning in its true form: a complex sandbox of rules that model the inner workings of civilisation in meticulous detail, right down to the tiny cars on its tangled roads.

56 LOLYMPICS

While the rest of the country works itself into a frenzy over boring actual sports, the PC Gamer staff test their mettle with a series of the nerdiest gaming challenges, from building a PC to instagib deathmatch.

WorldMags.net

MechWarrior reboots

THE BIG STORY First screenshots and new info on the stompy robots' free-to-play return

It's been 10 years since the last entry in the main *MechWarrior* series, but now the beloved robot simulation is coming back. It's free-to-play and powered by the very modern CryEngine 3 but, as the first screenshots show, there's a lot that's familiar.

Although *MechWarrior* is a first-person game about battling robots, the series has always been more about tactics and cockpit switches than twitch accuracy. *MechWarrior Online* sets those battles in a parallel timeline; in game, the date 15 April, 2012 is really 15 April, 3049. Each day that ticks off in our world advances the *MechWarrior* universe by a day.

That universe is split into 'Core Worlds' and 'Faction Worlds'. Major story events will take place in the Core, on planets controlled by the developers. Faction Worlds are more interesting though, as they can be captured by players and give bonuses to players and their teammates. Developers Piranha Games are hoping to create a universe where players form corporations – MechWarrior's equivalent to guilds – and where territorial control of regions ebbs and flows in a similar way to *EVE Online*.

Although the game will be free-to-play, Piranha are adamant that they won't have any pay-to-win items. If you want to advance through your BattleMech tech tree or up your corps' abilities, you'll need to win matches and earn Loyalty points. Those points can then be used to pay for Pilot Skills training or new modules for your metal beasts. Real money will be used to buy vanity items, or to expand the breadth of your options without expanding your power.

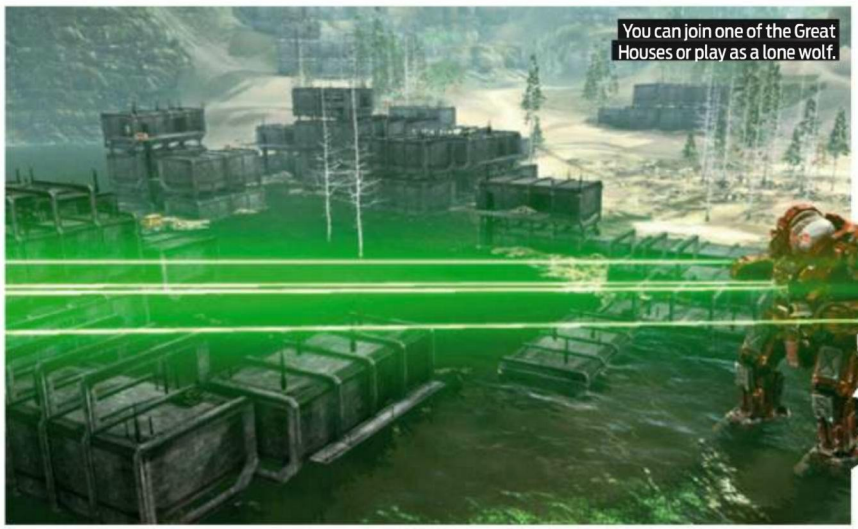
From what we know so far, it sounds a lot like *World of Tanks* in terms of the game's structure. You're not going to be spending time trekking from one frontline to another, but instead hopping directly into skirmishes. The persistent world exists in terms of the universe map and your own mech's abilities.

MechWarrior Online is due out later this year, and you can find more information at *mwomercs.com*. ■

Graham Smith

We have already registered our pilot name online: Hulk_Smash

Hmmmmmmm... lasers, lasers or lasers?

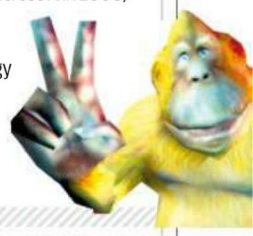

You can join one of the Great Houses or play as a lone wolf.

WorldMags.net

MOLYNEUX MOVES ON

RESTART GAME DESIGN LEGEND LEAVES LIONHEAD TO START NEW DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

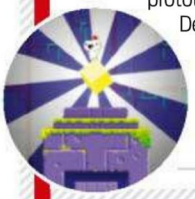
Peter Molyneux founded Bullfrog and Lionhead Studios, led the teams to create *Populous, Dungeon Keeper, Theme Park, Black & White* and *Fable*, and sold both companies for huge sums. He also invented dogs (*www.bit.ly/pcgdogs*). Now he's going to try to repeat his success a third time. The venerable game designer has left Lionhead, which was bought by Microsoft in 2006, to found 22 Cans, a new development studio with Lionhead's former chief technology officer Tim Rance. There's no information on what they're working on yet, but we'd guess they'll make some games. **GS**



IGF WINNERS ANNOUNCED

GRRRR INDIE CLASSIC WINS AWARD AMID CONTROVERSY

The winners of the Independent Games Festival have been revealed at this year's GDC in San Francisco. Puzzle platformer *Fez* won the Seamus McNally Grand Prize – an early prototype won the Excellence in Visual Design award in 2008, and its inclusion this year prompted criticism of the festival's judging process. Previous winners will be discouraged from resubmitting their games in the future. **GS**



HEALTH BAR

SORTING GOOD NEWS FROM BAD

Winners

Skyrim
Won Game of the Year at Games Developers Choice awards.

Tom and *Gunpoint*
The stealth puzzler won an IGF award in our hearts.

Mojang
They settled with Bethesda and get to use the name *Scrolls*.

Psychonauts 2
No *Psychonauts* sequel funding was arranged at GDC.

Steam Box rumours
No, Valve are not making a console. Move along now.

GAME stores
As we go to press, GAME go into receivership. Bummer.

Faildogs

WorldMags.net

"I'm Terry, I'm going to be your pilot tonight..."

Flight Simulator X has recently been superseded by *Flight*.

Keith Smith, Pilot Edge founder, directing planes.

The world's most hardcore simmers

We explore the services that fill flight sims with pilots, air traffic controllers and virtual airlines

Flight Simulator X and *X-Plane 10* provide an achingly realistic portrait of the mechanics of flight, from accurately modelled planes to real world locations, weather, failure states and physics.

Where those simulations fall apart is when it comes to filling their worlds with people. If you load up *X-Plane 10* and start at Heathrow, the world's busiest airport will be practically deserted except for a few taxiing ghost planes.

That's where the Virtual Air Traffic Simulator comes in. VATSIM is a network of virtual pilots and air traffic controllers dedicated to simulating not just the buttons and switches of flying, but the logging of flight plans, the conversations with airport control towers, and the long queues for an available runway for take-off. These are hobbyist pilots looking for a more accurate, and less lonely, flying experience.

When players connect to VATSIM, the other planes at the world's airports aren't ghosts, but other players. When they want to take off, they don't just throttle up and pull back on their flight stick. They speak over headsets to a real person playing the part of an air traffic controller, and wait for permission to take off.

As a free service, VATSIM is remarkable, but the quality of other pilots and the air traffic controllers you speak to can vary.

"These are hobbyist pilots looking for a more accurate, and less lonely, flying experience"

Some are trained professionals or extremely knowledgeable enthusiasts, but the most committed pilots turn to Pilot Edge, a similar, paid-for service.

"I used VATSIM and found that it was helpful, but not on a consistent, repeatable basis," says Keith Smith, Pilot Edge's founder. "I realised that there was room for a commercial-grade equivalent with quality control."

PilotEdge.net reaches out to professional or retired air traffic controllers and employs them to work on the Pilot Edge network. Practising pilots, trainees, and the most dedicated hobbyists then pay a monthly subscription for access to that network. "It's honestly a no-brainer for training pilots to gain exposure to flying 'in the system' for $19.95 a month, rather than at $150-plus an hour," Keith says.

The monthly subscription acts as its own quality assurance against mess-about pilots who might ruin the realism of the experience. It also pays for the air traffic controllers, who are quick to politely correct players who use the wrong radio frequency, or incorrectly employ jargon on the radio. These communications are all automatically recorded and uploaded as a resource for trainees. (Or for when your music runs out on long car journeys.) You can listen to them for free at *www.pilotedge.net/audio*.

Remarkably, there's a final step on the hardcore simmer hierarchy beyond even VATSIM or Pilot Edge, and that's to join a virtual airline. Sign up at *www.airfrontierva.com* for FedEx Virtual Cargo, and you'll be assigned one of FexEx's real routes, fly the same planes, and even simulate the added weight of the packages you're carrying. If you're a flight enthusiast, there are no heights to which your simulations can't stretch. ■

Graham Smith

WorldMags.net

"Arrows for sale. Get your arrows here."

Retail still matters

The success of *The Witcher* shows that the rise of digital is not inevitable

With the share price of retailers GAME continuing to fall at the time of writing, you'd be forgiven for thinking that digital distribution has become the dominant market force.

Not according to Martin Iwinski, joint CEO of CD Projekt RED, developers of *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings*. During his GDC talk about the success of his game, he presented some surprising sales figures.

Since its May 2011 release, *The Witcher 2* has sold over 1.1 million copies, but digital sales only account for 24%. The bulk – around 836,000 units – was shifted by retail stores.

The reason, he claimed, was the popularity of the sequel in eastern Europe, where retail is still dominant. In North America, sales leaned towards the digital market. 70% of the 270,000 US copies shifted were sold through digital stores.

But as you move east, the number of players buying their games through the traditional retail market increases. As a result, the combined digital sales figure of the rest of the world was only 81,000 copies. Given that Russia and Poland were the second and third biggest markets, buying a combined total of 420,000 copies, that's a huge win for boxes on shelves.

These figures are a direct contrast to the statement Paradox Interactive's CEO Frederik Wester made at E3 last year, claiming that 90% of their sales were digital and that "retail sales are like a bonus for us now. We don't really need retailers any more and that is a release because retailers have not been good for the industry."

Clearly they *have* been good for CD Projekt RED. Iwinski has promised that going forward, however you buy one of their games you'll be treated like a legitimate customer. Speaking to Joystiq, he said that for "Every subsequent game, we will never use any DRM. It's just over-complicating things." He shared a similar message with PC Gamer, towards the end of last year: "DRM does not work... it will be cracked in no time. Plus, the DRM itself is a pain for your legal gamers." ■

Phil Savage

Zing.

"I'm a king, you're an assassin. *Out.*"

THE NEW OLD REPUBLIC

MMOS BIOWARE ANNOUNCE UPCOMING CONTENT FOR *TOR*

The future of *TOR* has been laid out by BioWare. Speaking at the Old Republic Guild Summit, they revealed the contents of their upcoming patches, including details of their much touted legacy system. Designed to reduce the repetition of levelling alternate characters, it will let us purchase permanent XP boosts, focus on the class-based quests and PvP, and skip the planet-specific content. The full details of the summit, including the five areas BioWare are working to improve, can be found at *bit.ly/torsummit*. **PS**

WASTELAND, WANTLAND

APOCALYPSE GODFATHER OF FALLOUT TAKES TO KICKSTARTER

After 24 years, *Wasteland*, the RPG regarded as the inspiration for *Fallout*, looks set to get a sequel. Following Tim Schafer's successful plea to fans via Kickstarter, designer Brian Fargo is using the service to fund *Wasteland 2*. It's a more ambitious bid, $900,000, but the project received an impressive half a million in its first night. "We have tried to pitch this game multiple times to game publishers," the funding page states. "They don't think there's any interest in a solid, old school type of game." You can help prove them wrong at *kck.st/wasteland2*. **PS**

SAY WHAT?

THE MONTH IN TONGUES

"If you remove [sexism] from the fighting game community, it's not the fighting game community."
Aris Bakhtanians, pro fighting game coach, talking nonsense

"Hats are key to building an in-game economy... It grafts simply to the headbone."
Joe Ludwig, Valve, on the importance of hats

"I'm sorry Japanese guy! I was a bit rough, but your country's games are fucking terrible nowadays."
Phil Fish, creator of *Fez*, apologises for being mean about Japanese games

"Game in which you control a waterfall and must travel the world hiding outdoor passages from adventurers."
Peter MolyDEUX, parody Twitter account, inspires a game jam

WorldMags.net

THE SPY

The Spy cannot reveal his sources, or let them live.

In the Spy's line of work – primarily Spying – it pays to be able to pass a lie detector test. That's why in 1963 he underwent a painful six week procedure to deaden his skin's galvanic response, one of the primary metrics used by a polygraph.

It's why he uses two pacemakers and a wolf's heart to maintain a perfectly regular pulse in every situation. It's why he had his skull EM-shielded the same day functional magnetic resonance imaging was introduced to detect brain activity. And it's why he spent most of 1978 repeatedly and emphatically telling a Bolivian marmoset that it was the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. So that he could lie without mercy, without pause, without hesitation or biometrically detectable stress. It's also why he doesn't really care if Valve make a Steam Box.

Rumours that Valve are planning a standardised, living-room PC exploded when a journalist wrote that he'd 'heard' they would. One of its key features, the internet dreamt, would be integration of the biometric sensors Valve have been toying with, to measure and respond to the player's emotional state during play. A feature entirely useless to a dead-skinned, wolf-hearted, metal-skulled monkeytricker like the Spy.

Anyone technically still human will be sad to know the Spy can detect no such plans. Valve are still scheming about how to do science to your skin and brain while you play, but they haven't even decided whether to make that hardware themselves or find a partner to do it for them.

A similarly persistent rumour in the PC gaming speakeasies and gentleman's clubs may be closer to reality: an *Elder Scrolls* MMO. Bethesda describe their current *Elder Scrolls* games as 'massively single player'. Any marketing executive worth his cocaine knows that you only have to change one word of that to get a fresh convoy of money trucks every month. And this time the murmurs go beyond the financial inevitability of the thing. This time, there's *lore*.

Rumour has it that *The Elder Scrolls Online*, as rumour says it's called, will be set several hundred years before any of the current games. Rumour claims three playable factions, but rumour does not name them. At that time in the lore, the elves had united, the founder of the Empire was an up-and-coming general, and the whole continent was being invaded by an Asian-styled race long gone in the other *Elder Scrolls* games: the Akaviri.

Rumour also stipulates an announcement in May, so we'll know soon enough whether rumour is a connected industry source or an imaginative jerk. The Spy buys it.

> **"It'll be dark times for PlayStation, if it's true"**

The Spy was in San Francisco – indeed, the Spy is everywhere – for GDC in March. The Unreal Engine 4 was not. Nothing conspicuous about that, except Epic's explanation. The makers of probably the most-used engine in mainstream games say they couldn't show the new one off because of an NDA – someone *else's* NDA. Why would anyone else be able to restrict when Epic talk about their engine? It would take a deal of enormous value and importance. A deal only a platform owner would be in a position to make. An exclusivity deal. A platform exclusivity deal. Look, it's probably Microsoft.

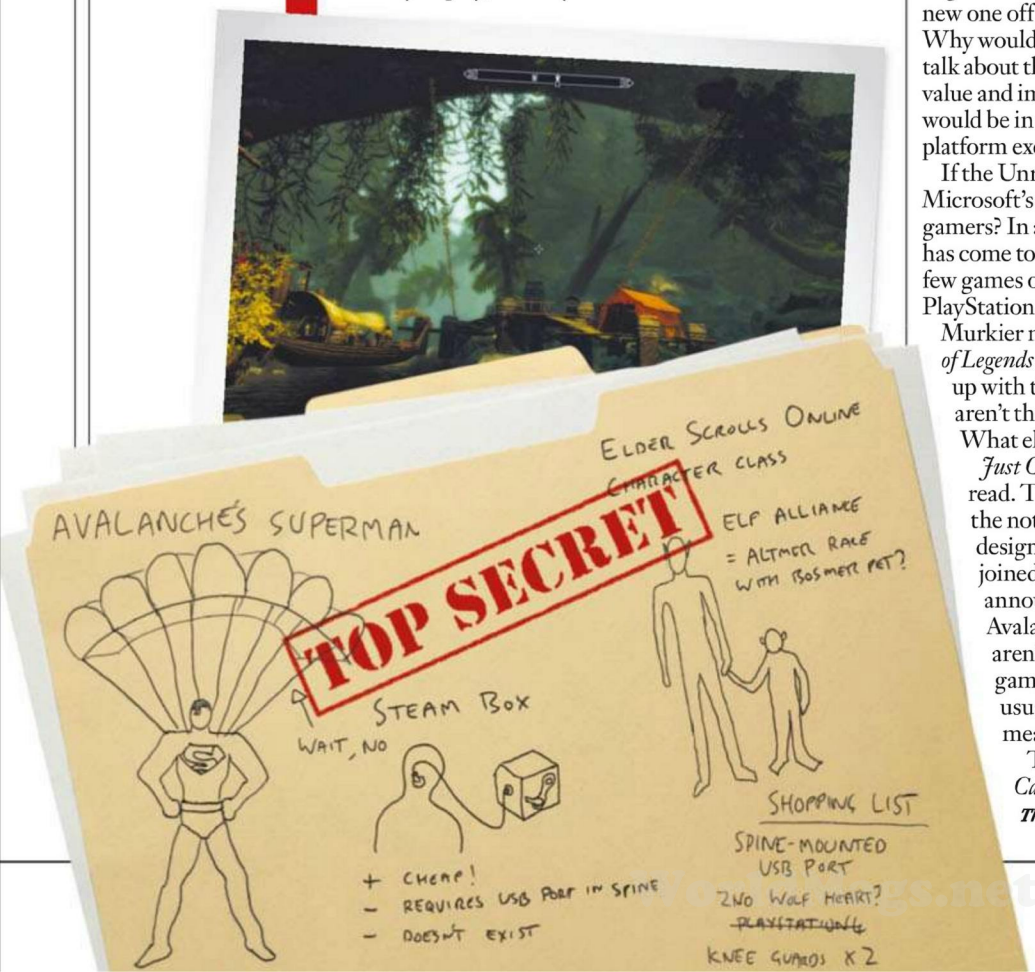
If the Unreal Engine 4 ends up being exclusive to Microsoft's next console, what does it mean for PC gamers? In all likelihood, nothing bad: 'Xbox exclusive' has come to mean 'Xbox and PC exclusive' for all but a few games of this generation. It'll be dark times for PlayStation if it's true, though.

Murkier mumblings say that Riot Games, the *League of Legends* devs, have been expanding rapidly to keep up with the spectacular success of their *Dota*-like. But aren't they expanding a little *too* rapidly for just that? What else are they making?

Just Cause creators Avalanche are even harder to read. The Spy had them pegged as the developers of the not very secret Mad Max game, but the designer they were thought to be working with has joined Crystal Dynamics. They're due to announce a licensed game at E3 this year, but Avalanche founder Chris Sunderburg says "We aren't particularly interested in movie-based games." A non-movie licence? In gameland, that usually means comics. And comics usually means superheroes.

Time to install the Superman mod for *Just Cause 2* and daydream. Spy out. ■

The Spy



Bring on the high-definition destruction!

Battlefield 3 expands

Multiple expansions for the military shooter will strike this year

Battlefield 3 might not have worked out all its kinks, but that hasn't stopped DICE from expanding their war efforts. Three more DLC expansions are planned, following on from last year's reworked *Battlefield 2* maps in the *Back to Karkand* pack.

Close Quarters is set for release in July, and looks to focus on smaller, indoor environments and infantry combat. It's a clear attempt to eat more of *Call of Duty*'s lunch, and while it's not the traditional setup for the series, DICE are promising vertical combat and plenty of destruction, right down to the furniture. It'll also include new weapons and more of the unlockable assignments first seen in *Back to Karkand*.

The second pack, due in autumn, is *Armored Kill*, which aims to provide a more traditional large-scale *Battlefield* experience. The expansion promises new tanks, ATVs and mobile artillery, and even claims to include the biggest map in the series' history. The last pack to release is *Battlefield: End Game*. Due in the winter, DICE are currently keeping tight-lipped about what the climatically titled expansion will entail.

In addition to the upcoming maps and weapons, DICE are working to ship a giant patch that they hope will address players' issues with the game. In a post on The Battlefield Blog, general manager Karl Magnus Troedsson claims, "It's been in the works for quite some time now, and the reason it's taking its time is we want to make it a really great update."

He goes on to say that the delay has been caused by console certification, admitting that it makes more sense to bundle non-essential changes into one large patch instead of smaller yet more regular ones. While none of the individual fixes look particularly game-changing, the sheer number of them should make quite the difference when the patch releases in the spring. ■

Phil Savage

SCROLLS FIGHT SETTLED

FRIENDSHIP MOJANG AND BETHESDA'S LAWYERS MAKE UP

In a short post on the Mojang blog, Carl Manneh announced, "We have settled the lawsuit over *Scrolls*, and Mojang and Bethesda are friends again." The disagreement initially arose when Mojang attempted to register the name of their upcoming card duelling RPG as *Scrolls*, which Bethesda saw as an infringement on their existing *The Elder Scrolls* trademark. The settlement allows Mojang to keep the name, but gives the trademark to Bethesda – and Mojang are also barred from using the name for any future game, including a sequel. More on Mojang's upcoming card game can be found at *scrolls.com*. **PS**

MOST DANGEROUS GAME

TWEED BIG ROBOT REVEAL BRITISH ROBOT HUNTERS IN NEW GAME

Big Robot have announced *Sir, You Are Being Hunted*, an open-world survival game set in a sinister countryside full of sharply dressed, gentlemanly robots out to hunt humans for sport. It's billed as a "British indie *Stalker*" by its designer, Jim Rossignol, who used to work for us before he got delusions of grandeur and ponced away like a big ninny. "The game gathers up elements of my favourite things," he says, speaking from his new life in regret-filled obscurity, "exploration, AI interaction, survival, robots and hot drinks, and blends them into a rich pixelly pulp." Read more about the project at *big-robot.com*. **GS**

TRENDS

GAMERS SENDING A MESSAGE

It can be hard to get the attention of those responsible for the games we love. An extended rant on a forum or comment thread might prove cathartic, but it's not the best way to get noticed. Here are three cases where gamers have instead grouped together behind a single cause in an effort to make themselves heard.

1 No Effect

On the Bioware forums, a user poll suggests a happier ending be patched into *Mass Effect 3*. "You would really have to work your ass off to do this," the author suggests, and 4,679 people seem eager to try. Less successful was EA's own petition for the UK government to release evidence of UFO activity. The stunt only received 1,571 signatures – far short of the 100,000 needed.

2 Masochists

"PC gamers love unforgiving, hardcore games," states the author of the '*Dark Souls* for PC' petition – and the campaign has collected an impressive 89,000 signatures. Although no official plans have been revealed, the Namco Bandai admin who first suggested fans start a petition was upbeat. "If you wanted the attention of Namco Bandai Games, now you have it."

3 Red Letter Day

At the beginning of February, over 13,000 fans launched *Half-Life 2* in a protest to let Valve know that people *really* love *Half-Life*. Organised by the 60,000 strong Steam group A Call for Communication, the stunt was part of a campaign to get Valve to release information about the next *Half-Life* game. While Valve aren't likely to be concerned about thousands of people playing their game, it's a friendly reminder that people are anticipating the follow-up.

WorldMags.net

FACE OFF

Should everything in games be skippable?

YES Let people focus on the bits of games they actually enjoy.

NO You can already skip things in games you don't like by not playing.

Chris Thursten tries to bypass actual conversations by carrying a keyboard with him at all times and aggressively pressing Escape.

Graham Smith ate too many Skips crisps as a child in order to get a free watch. Now he hates skipping of all kinds.

CH: Unskippable challenges in games are a relic of the arcade era: a product of the mindset that says you should always be under threat of losing your 20p to the machine or you're not having fun. That's why we've always been perfectly happy with skippable cutscenes in games: some players just want to get to the next challenge. Well, news flash: games aren't just about beating sequential combat encounters any more: they're about storytelling. If someone doesn't feel that watching five minutes of men with guns squatting behind boxes contributes to their experience, then why not let them skip it?

GS: You're right on one point, at least: games are as much about story as they are about combat. So let's make story unskippable, too. Right now we treat games as disposable chaff, to be hurriedly chewed through for the brief moments we remember they exist before distractedly running on to the next one. Let's stop that, and begin demanding that games receive as much respect and attention from their audiences as books and films do. Let's make it compulsory to experience the entire work as the developer conceived it.

CT: Games don't demand attention from their audiences, they demand participation. That's the reason that comparisons to books and films don't hold water. Even if you don't understand parts of a film, it'll continue without you. If you're no good at a certain type of game, you're locked out. Similarly, games are too diverse as experiences to simply say "if you don't like it, play something else." It's common for players to cherry-pick the things they enjoy about a game. Why discriminate over what can be bypassed completely?

GS: If I don't speak Korean, I'm locked out of Korean films. That's OK. It's OK not to experience everything. I'm saying, let's not discriminate: let's make everything unskippable. If I'm lucky, Korean filmmakers will provide English subtitles to their films, but I'm not entitled to those. Equally, I'm not entitled to the easy modes that already stop me from being locked out of games. Skip buttons are a step too far, because it's insulting to developers to demand that they spend years working on something and yet should expect so little participation from ourselves in return.

The debate is over

But whose opinion should be skipped? Tell us your thoughts at *pcgamer.com/forum*

CT: 'Accessible' doesn't mean 'easy'. A player might agonise over a decision they have to make in an RPG that has no mechanical complexity whatsoever – it's just choosing some item from a chat menu. But the fact remains that it's difficult and meaningful for that player, who maybe has no interest in complicated combat systems or strong violence. That doesn't make them less of a gamer.

GS: I absolutely agree. There is no hierarchy of gamers, or of kinds of gaming. All tastes are equally valid. Except for yours, obviously. What I'm suggesting, however, is that everything should also be *equally* unskippable, because if game developers can't at least expect attention from their audience, it's much harder to tell complex stories that embody complex emotions.

There's a risk that games become a bland slurry, as plot and story and character are reduced until they can be understood by the person hitting the skip button. What happens once developers have to cater to the least engaged amongst us? More worryingly, if we can't ask more of ourselves, shouldn't we ask more of our games? I want games that are so good in all ways that they don't *need* to be skipped.

CT: If players are skipping a certain section of a game, then the onus is on the developers to figure out why. The problem is that the current system assumes that some game mechanics – particularly combat – are the be-all-and-end-all, and can't be ignored. That thinking already has a detrimental effect on the ability of games to tell stories. Think how useful it would be to developers to have actual information about what players do and don't enjoy. If developers were suddenly given access to data that said that 60% of players skipped escort quests, for example, then the impact on game design in general could be very positive.

Strong-arming a player into service isn't the solution: developers should be figuring out how to get them to participate willingly, and that means giving gamers the power to define their own experiences.

GS: I fundamentally agree with you on all points, as any rational human being would, but for the sake of the argument I must conclude by pointing out that you're a stupidhead and definitely wrong.

WorldMags.net

Steam Collections bring mods to many

Valve unveil a new way of organising and installing the best game tweaks

Valve recently rolled out support for Steam Collections: groups of mods put together by the community from inside Steam Workshop.

Subscribe to a group and you'll be able to download and install some or all of its carefully chosen tweaks, fixes, reskins and fan-made chunks of new stuff, straight into your game. There are none of the .ini file-tweaking and hard crashes that have traditionally turned the tech-stupid away from the noble pursuit of modding.

It's our hope that Collections will usher in a new age of modding. Modders have already taken to the new system – Valve told us that *Team Fortress 2* modellers have made hundreds of thousands of dollars from their creations – but it's down to developers and publishers to incorporate support into their games. Only *TF2* and *Skyrim* so far have Steam Workshop mod support, but Valve promise the same for both *Portal 2* and *Left 4 Dead 2*. Other publishers want in: Paradox's *Gettysburg: Armoured Warfare* comes with an editor that integrates straight into the Workshop.

Collections can be put together by any player, but they're designed to be self-regulating. Collections of junk will get rated badly and disappear off the face of the internet, but cherry-picked compendiums of mods that work together to improve your game will live on the front page.

Knowledgeable friends can also help each other out, creating Collections of useful add-ons for pals. You could make a list of animal-changing tweaks that turn a game's spiders into cuddly bears for your arachnophobic friend. Or you could pretend to have made a list that does that, and instead fill it with spider-bears that when they roar, shoot spiders out of their mouths.

We'd never do that to you, though. We'll prove it: our first two Steam Collections are for *Skyrim*, and we've chosen the best game tweaks to enhance your experience, as well as the best fan-made missions for those who want even more 'Rimming.

Find our Improvements Collection at *bit.ly/rimprove*, and our New Content Collection at *bit.ly/rimnew*, and make your *Skyrim* even better. ■

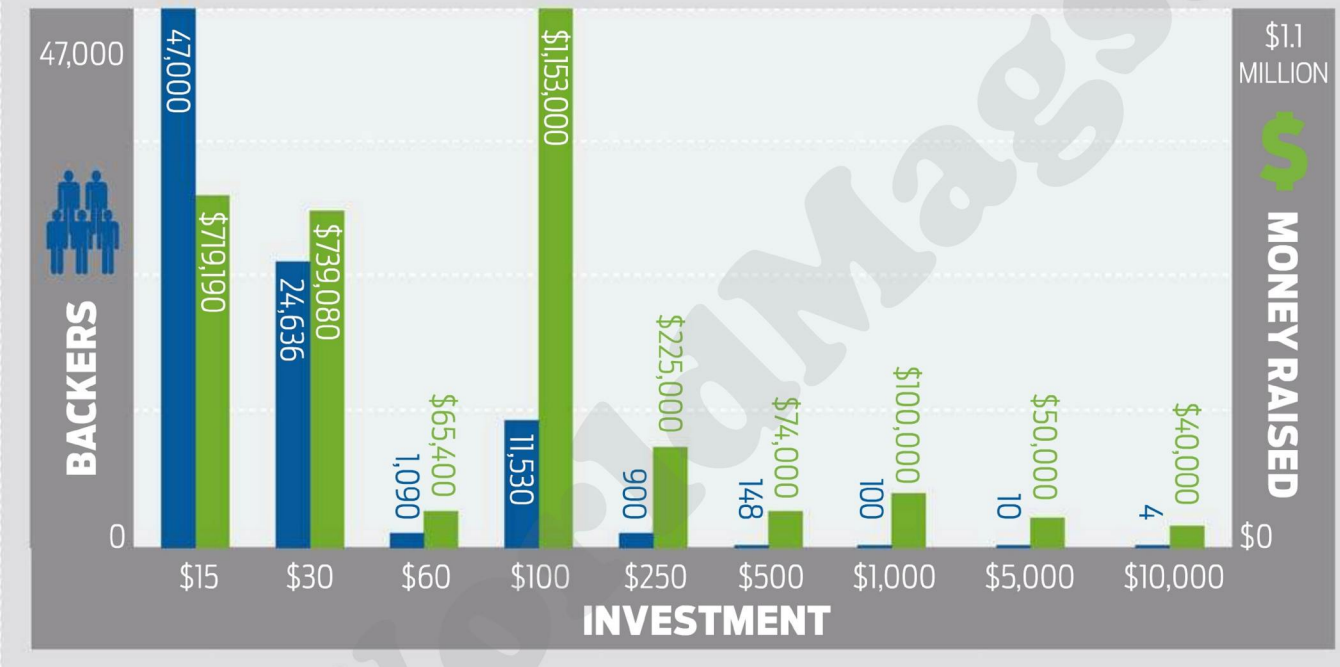
Rich McCormick

Drummi's Mark and Recall mod.

The Fashionable Megalomaniac by Napy da Wise.

DOUBLE FINE'S MILLIONS

WHICH PRE-ORDER OPTIONS MADE THE MOST MONEY FOR THEIR KICKSTARTER-FUNDED ADVENTURE GAME?



INCOMING

3 MONTHS AWAY

RISEN 2: DARK WATERS

While the original was standard fantasy RPG fare, *Dark Waters* boasts all the rum, sea monsters and pirate-infested tropical islands you can handle.

Release APRIL 27

TERA

This anime-inspired fantasy MMO is marked out by its distinctive brawler-style combat that can be controlled using a gamepad. It also features day-long guild vs guild PvP tournaments.

Release MAY 1

THE SECRET WORLD

An ambitious modern-day MMO that promises to bring the best of ARGs and adventure games to the online RPG. Expect cults, conspiracies, and a smattering of Cthulhu.

Release JUNE 21

SPEC OPS: THE LINE

Third-person shooter reimagining of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, set in the crumbling ruins of Dubai. Hugely ambitious, it's attempting to deliver gunplay with a human side.

Release JUNE 26

DARKSIDERS II

A mix of third-person melee combat, puzzles and exploration starring Death. He's a Horseman of the Apocalypse on a mission, out to clear the name of his brother, War.

Release JUNE 29

6 MONTHS AWAY

BORDERLANDS 2

Gearbox have had to invent even sillier words to describe the amount of randomly-generated guns in this RPG/FPS hybrid. Expect open-world co-op blasting and lots and lots of loot.

Release SEPTEMBER

FAR CRY 3

The heart of the game is still about carving your own path through dynamic combat encounters, but Ubisoft's sequel is promising a dramatic plot to complement the free-form action.

Release SEPTEMBER

MEDAL OF HONOR: WARFIGHTER

The first modern military shooter made with EA's new Frostbyte 2 engine. The campaign will take you around the world, from Somalia to the Philippines.

Release OCTOBER

BIOSHOCK INFINITE

Irrational Games promise to raise the bar for the narrative shooter once again, with a new quasi-historical setting and a pair of leading characters with a complex, evolving relationship.

Release OCTOBER

ASSASSIN'S CREED 3

New assassin Connor fights through the American Revolution in the finale to Desmond's story. There'll be a greater focus on outdoor exploration, including tree-climbing and hunting.

Release OCTOBER

9+ MONTHS AWAY

DISHONOURED

A sleeper hit waiting to happen, this immersive FPS is set in a distinctive steampunk world and features an array of gadgets and powers with which to conquer its open-ended missions.

Release 2012

GRAND THEFT AUTO V

The first full *GTA* game for four years is set in Los Angeles look-a-like Los Santos with a new protagonist and huge outdoor environments. Rockstar claim it's the biggest game they've ever made.

Release OCTOBER

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: MISTS OF PANDARIA

With the Cataclysm behind it, Azeroth enters a new era, with a brand new race, class, and story. Looks to be a comprehensive revamp of the world's biggest MMO.

Release 2012

COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS 2

BioWare are taking a back to basics approach to C&C after the radical changes of *Tiberian Twilight*. It's set in the near future, with realistic military units and tech.

Release 2013

SIMCITY

The fifth *SimCity* features a new breed of natural disaster, including climate change and the search for clean resources. Maxis say their new 'GlassBox' engine allows for the most detailed simulation yet.

Release 2013

CAN'T WAIT?

YOU CAN PLAY THESE GREAT GAMES RIGHT NOW

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
Bethesda's best RPG is still the place to go for immense, dynamic, personal adventure.

Terraria
Development has come to an end, but this 2D building and adventure game still has secrets to be discovered.

The Darkness II
Man-devouring tentacles are the perfect complement to a pair of Uzis. A pleasant – if bloody – surprise.

SLIPPED!

ARMA 3
Bohemia's military sim was supposed to be released in the summer, but it'll now be entering a 'community alpha' phase instead.

WorldMags.net

All the best players go into management in the end.

Counter-Strike's cArn retires

One of the world's greatest pro-gamers logs out

Patrik 'cArn' Sättermon will be remembered as one of the world's most successful *Counter-Strike* players. The Swede has a wealth of top-tier tournament finishes on his CV, stretching across more than half a decade of playing *CS 1.6* at a professional level.

cArn announced his retirement from professional tournament play just prior to March's Intel Extreme Masters World Championship finals in Hanover. We caught up with him to find out what one of the *CS* scene's leading lights is planning to do next, and how he sees e-sport progressing.

Why have you decided to retire from competitive play?
I simply figured it was about time to move on with my life. I have been a professional gamer since 2004 and everything that has a beginning has an end. I have moved to Taipei, and plan to stay around Fnatic and become a player manager.

As one of e-sport's comparatively 'older' players, have you had trouble keeping up with younger players?
To be honest, it's difficult. Reflexes and precision decline after turning 25 so eventually you are leaning more on your experience and knowledge of the game to get out on top of your opponents by time.

What was the hardest thing about being a competitive player?
All the sacrifices you have to make to stay on top. Practice consumes up to 10 hours per day prior to a big tournament so family, friends and education suffer. Overall, everything has been worth it: the people and the places I have had the chance to see has paid back all the hard hours of practice, big time.

Where does *CS* go next?
I wish I had a great answer to that. I'm divided knowing we are struggling to attract new players. We can't simply compete against companies like Riot, who put a lot of effort into marketing their game globally.

How would you maintain e-sport's current rise in popularity?
Working hard, simple as that. We are very big right now, but also very small. You can say we are in our own small bubble which is yet to pop and become mainstream. We should learn from the mistakes in the past, and work hard to be role models and sportspeople that young people can admire. ■

Rich McCormick

BAD BOSS BATTLES

SORRY *DEUS EX: HR*'S DEVELOPERS APOLOGISE FOR THEIR MISTAKE

Square Enix game designer Francois Lapikas apologised at GDC for *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*'s notorious boss fights. "We are truly sorry," he said, explaining that the battles weren't put in until late in the game's development. "We figured by putting enough ammo in the room, we would be fine and could move on. Next time we'll think about them more. They were a big part of the game and we should have put more effort into them." **CT**

MINECRAFT CREATOR NOTCHES UP AWARD

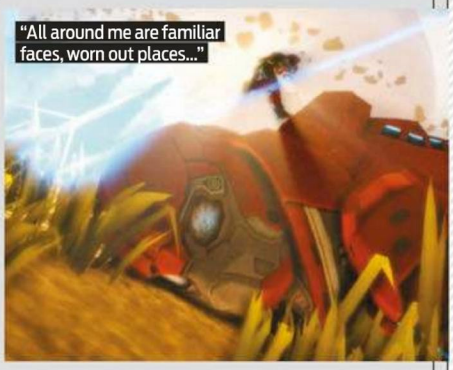
PRIZES MARKUS 'NOTCH' PERSSON PICKS UP A BAFTA

As the world's indie developers were busy picking up awards at GDC, *Minecraft* creator Markus "Notch" Persson found himself the recipient of a shiny BAFTA. Academy video game committee chair Ray Maguire said that Notch was "an inspiration for all game developers", and that this Special Award "reflects the determination and innovation that he continues to show to both the developer community and to gamers worldwide." The big man himself was "blown away and humbled" by the news. Congrats, Notch! **CT**

LOL OF THE MONTH

TRIBES' LLAMA DRAMA

Tribes players know that the only thing more emotionally heart-wrenching than a dead CGI child is a llama grab. Developers Hi-Rez show the poignant impact of llama-grabbing – slow-moving players picking up the game's pivotal flag in vain attempts to get it back to their home base – by sending up last year's much-discussed *Dead Island* trailer: starting with a dead soldier before showing his clumsy capture attempt in flashback, complete with sad music and slow motion reverse-o-death. Prepare to cry at: *bit.ly/loltribes*.


"All around me are familiar faces, worn out places..."

WorldMags.net

Notch chatted awkwardly in front of a specially-programmed 8-bit fire.

Six exciting new ideas from GDC 2012

This year's teachings from the world's smartest game developers

GDC is the pre-eminent event in the games development calendar – thousands of the most talented people in games development crammed into two halls in San Francisco, riffing endlessly off each other's ideas, then partying late into the night. Publishers and indies vie to show off their games – inside the show, celebrity gamers are lauded like nowhere else. Notch had a permanent comet of hangers-on; even Frederick Raynal, retiring creator of *Alone in the Dark* and *Little Big Planet*, confessed to us that he's never had so much attention in his life as at GDC.

Unlike past years, GDC didn't have a huge single theme in 2012, beyond an acceptance that F2P and social games are dominant, and that the old mainstream gamers are as specialist as the hardcore gamers. That's not to say big ideas didn't come out of it, just that they were buried in the hundreds of great talks, demos and booths around the show. We attended the show, and have picked out the best ideas we encountered there for your delectation.

Games for health

Of the many developers working on alternate applications for video games – education, fitness, disability, and so on – the developers seeking to promote health through games have been curiously silent. Designer Jane McGonigal created a game to motivate herself to cure her concussion, which she's now released as a free social tool (*superbetter.com*). It uses the mechanisms and language of social games to enforce healthy activities. Similarly, Dr Rajiv Kumar's ShapeUp is already running social games to promote positive behaviour in more than 50 major corporations, covering 2,000,000 people. Some of his games use GreenGoose stickers, tiny proprietary transmitters that track item activity and can be attached to almost anything – glasses, brooms or even toilet seats – which can then be incorporated into health game programs.

"Publishers and indie developers vie to show off their games at the conference"

Dan says...
If you care about the ideas behind games, you should really check out the GDC talks vault at *gdcvault.com*. You'll need to be a paid-up subscriber to access most of the talks, except the sponsored ones, but you can see all of the slideshows on the site for free.

Brain control is advancing – fast

The tech behind NeuroSky's mind-reading software may be the sixty-year-old EEG and ECG systems, but the advance of all the other tech around it and its cunning software means it's economical to create bizarre tools and games with it. The most visible applications are the simplistic brain-controlled Necomimi cat ears, Mattel Mindflex and Star Wars Force Trainer, but the team are providing tech to lots of other applications, including back

WorldMags.net

into neuroscience. Now they've proven the technology, they're looking to expand the range and sensitivity of their devices beyond concentration and meditation measurement.

Making games can destroy your health

As David Sirlin pointed out on his site (*sirlin.net*), many of the more successful developers this year almost died making their games – or thought they were going to. Yoichi Hayashida of Nintendo talked about how he thought he was going to die during Japan's catastrophic Tohoku earthquake in 2011, and how his team motivated themselves through the aftershocks and radiation scares by thinking that *Super Mario 3D Land* was going to put smiles back on the people's faces. The Indie Fund's Aaron Isacksen explained how he'd come to the realisation overwork was seriously hurting his health, and outlined helpful ways for fellow developers to both finish their game and maintain a good quality of life. Steve Swink cancelled the inspiring *Shadow Physics* because it was destroying his health. Ed McMillen of *Super Meat Boy* and IGF Grand Prize winner Phil Fish talked in the excellent Indie Game: The Movie about how their health was destroyed during development – McMillen talked about having to spend $50,000 on emergency surgery because he couldn't afford health insurance, while Fish has been on the verge of a nervous breakdown throughout development. He couldn't even speak when he won the award.

Designing good virtual currencies is hard

EVE may have its own personal economist, who has a team dedicated to bursting asset bubbles, but all these companies creating their own tokens, coins or credits for microtransactions should really have attended the talk by Vili Lehdonvirta of the London School of Economics.

He insisted that the distinction between a real currency and a virtual currency was just down to the larger area of application of the former. Good money, he argued, is a good medium of exchange, a good store of value and a good measure of value – this makes a game economy run smoothly. He showed that there were attributes to bad money, such as being hard to divide, vulnerable to theft, costly to store, perishable, public, and misrecognisable, which made it inconvenient for the user; for example, Microsoft Points, which are only available in set amounts.

Will Wright, Romero, Cliffy B and Sid Meier! In one place!

Lucy Bradshaw announces the new *SimCity*.

Every major company has a stand at GDC.

Established devs come to learn and network.

Developers Suda 51 are celebrities here.

Developers' favourite games are not your favourite games

GDC always pulls the big name game developers out of the woodwork, and this year was no exception. The goldmine was the combined force of Will Wright, John Romero, Sid Meier and Cliffy B talking about the games that influenced them. John Romero spoke of his love of *Pacman* – how *Wolfenstein* and *Doom* were just *Pacman* analogues, and *Wolfenstein* even includes a *Pacman* homage. Cliffy B, maker of snarling man-shoots, told us about how all he ever wanted to play was the *Legend of Zelda*, because he never knew what was around the corner.

Sid Meier talked about the more obscure *Seven Cities of Gold*, which entirely changed his concept of what a game was; its use of history, roleplaying and adventure directly inspired all of *Pirates*, *Civilization* and *Railroad Tycoon*. Will Wright, as is his wont, chose an extremely obscure title – *Bill Budge's Pinball Construction Set* – a game that created user-generated content and established a visual level design language, and led Wright to make *Sim City*.

Instrumentalisation

It's a big word for a simple concept. Game designer and performance artist Eric Zimmerman began his speech arguing that we were living in the "ludic century". He went on to argue that despite this, games shouldn't be reduced to systems and 'instruments', or else we risk losing their magic. Books, Zimmerman told his audience, can be used mechanically to convey facts - but they can also be inspiring.

By paring games back to their bare mechanics, Eric complained we're presenting their worst face to the world at large, showing people monetised Facebook click-farms when we've got so much more. He compared these instrumentalised games to books on how to pick up members of the opposite sex, suggesting both activities had systems to master. But as the existence of the latter doesn't preclude the existence of love, instrumentalised games don't mean our medium doesn't contain beauty. ■

Dan Griliopoulos

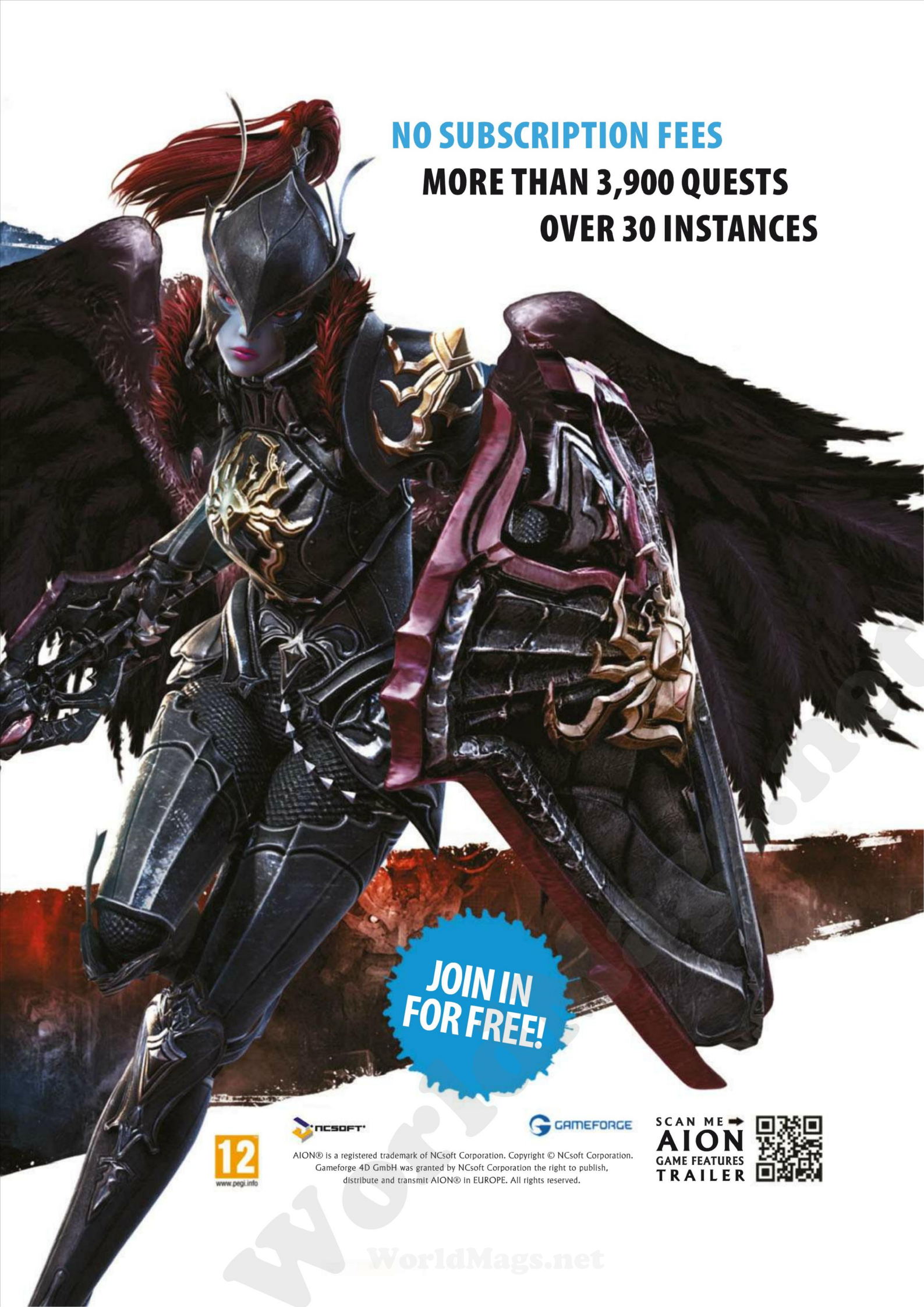
IGF nominees were also on display, apparently.

Chet and Erik on why they shouldn't have made *Portal 2*.

There were even some games at GDC!

WorldMags.net

AION®
FREE-TO-PLAY
AION
IS
BACK
PLAY.AIONFREETOPLAY.COM



WorldMags.net

The adult Pandaren Monk must kick its own weight in ass every day.

The Hozen are the Horde's allies. Not too bright.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT
MISTS OF PANDARIA

PLAYED IT Exploring the hardcore side of Blizzard's panda party

Since its announcement, Blizzard have been keen to reassure fans that *Mists of Pandaria* isn't a step sideways for the MMO. *World of Warcraft*'s first three expansions each focused on a different villain from the series' history, providing a sense of momentum that reached its climax with the defeat of the world-shattering dragon Deathwing. Azeroth's growth has always been based on what came before, and its largest new territories have traditionally been a return to locations first encountered in the original strategy games. "I think nostalgia is hard to underestimate in *WoW*," says Cory Stockton, lead content designer. "Where you go wrong is when you think that nostalgia is all that is keeping people in the game. Nostalgia is cool occasionally, but the game needs to be full of fresh new features to keep people engaged." *Mists of Pandaria* is the first time that nostalgia has been kicked to the curb in favour of something entirely new.

READ ME
PUBLISHER Blizzard
DEVELOPER In-house
LINK battle.net

The monk class, Pandaren race and their starting area are intended to draw new players into the expansion, but the lost island of Pandaria is being treated as an opportunity for Blizzard to address longstanding issues with *World of Warcraft*'s endgame. "One thing that we know we didn't do well with *Cataclysm* was create enough level 85 content," Stockton

"Nostalgia is cool, but the game needs to be full of new features to keep people engaged"

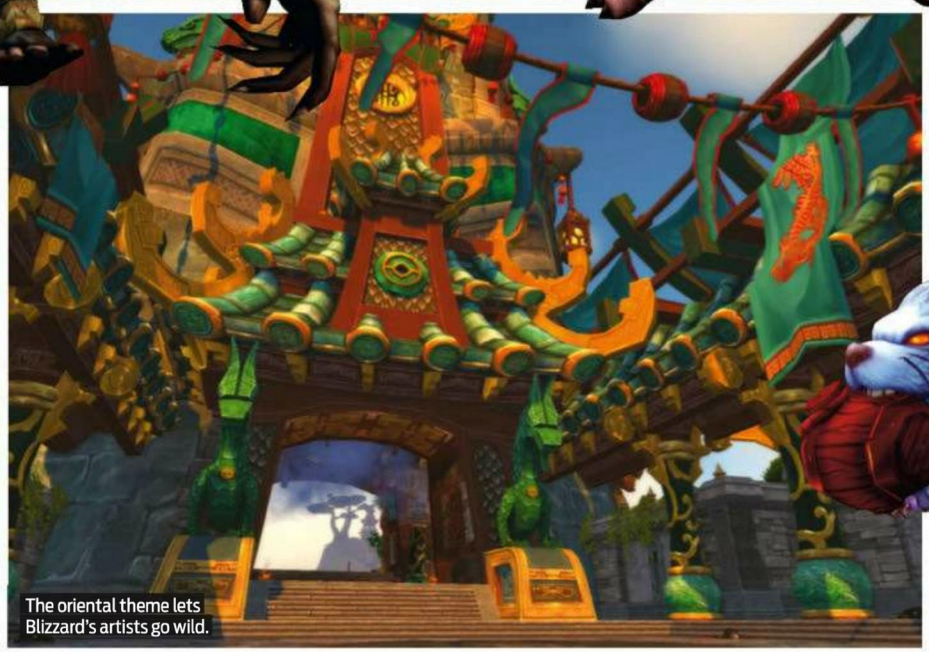
explains. "People were expecting a lot of new stuff and they got more raids and more dungeons and more item levels, which is very similar to what we'd delivered with [*Wrath of the Lich King*'s] Northrend." In addition to a new level 85-90 quest series that will introduce players to the factions and conflicts of the new continent, the experience when that level cap is reached is getting a thorough overhaul, to be broader, more accessible, and more competitive than *WoW* has ever been.

Level 85 Alliance players begin their Pandarian adventure in the southern part of The Jade Forest, after a shipwreck strands your expeditionary force on the shore. The hastily erected camp where you begin is under siege from the Hozen, a race of short-tempered monkey warriors and the first of several new factions that Blizzard have created to populate Pandaria. The first few quests follow familiar *WoW* lines – put out fires, fend off the attackers, then strike out in the brush to hunt tigers and rescue crash survivors.

Things become more interesting when you head off in search of the ship's missing captain. He's being held in a Hozen camp where you also encounter the imprisoned leader of the Jinyu, a clan of koi carp people at war with the Hozen. The Jinyu can use 'watercrafting' magic to see the future, and during one such summoning they see a spectral representation of your own character leading them to victory against the monkey onslaught. The Jinyu promptly become the Alliance's first allies on Pandaria, and an important part of

WorldMags.net

Showing up for a raid in your pyjamas is frowned upon.



The oriental theme lets Blizzard's artists go wild.

Suicide-bomber rabbits. Seriously.

their escalating conflict with the Horde.

The Horde, you see, are arming the Hozen warriors and sending them after the Jinyu. This developing proxy war between Azeroth's rulers is what propels them both further into Pandaria in search of power, and will ultimately set up an all-out conflict that will play out in the post-launch patches, culminating in the siege of Orgrimmar to take down rogue warchief Garrosh Hellscream. When Azeroth's ruling powers truly turn their sights on Pandaria, we're told to expect drastic changes to the landscape. The content's coastal zones currently feature blank expanses of beach and jungle where, in vice president of creative development Chris Metzen's words, "the armour will roll up".

Exploring untouched Pandaria, what stands out is how remarkably *WoW* has aged. For an MMO that was built to be compatible with older machines back in 2004, Blizzard's art team has achieved remarkable things. The Jade Forest is a luminous green sea of bamboo, jutting stone karsts and tumbling waterfalls. The first instance, the Temple of the Jade Serpent, is meticulously decorated with friezes and murals that merge *WoW*'s chunky architecture with traditional East Asian art. Two of *Mists of Pandaria*'s new dungeons will be reworkings of *WoW* classics Scholomance and The Scarlet Monastery, but these also serve to illustrate just how far the game has come in creative terms. Grinding through the brick and stone of Scholomance loses some of its lustre when compared with the hand-painted detail of Pandaria's new zones.

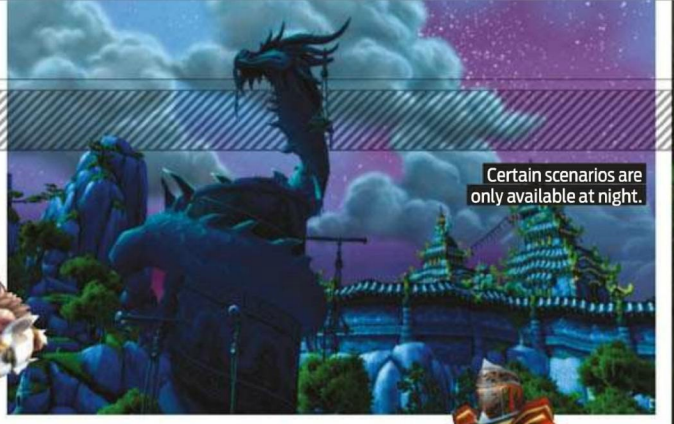
"Exploring untouched Pandaria, what stands out is how remarkably *WoW* has aged"

Since BlizzCon, Pandaria has been expanded from five zones to seven. As players work through the environments and earn favour with the native Pandaren, they'll also come into contact with the extensive history of the continent. Ancient rulers the Mogu – who look like a cross between an orc, a Draenei and a bear – are the main villains, but they're joined by the rapidly multiplying evil rabbits the Virmen, rampaging lizardmen Saurok, and bison-like Tauren offshoot the Yaungol. Each new zone brings its own features and challenges. In Kun-Lai Summit, you'll be working for the favour of the Shado-Pan, a mountain-bound clan of warrior Pandaren who are sworn to guard against the evils of the Sha, an energy force that gives negative emotions like doubt and anger a malevolent physical form. Panda Jedi that live in a ninja fortress, basically.

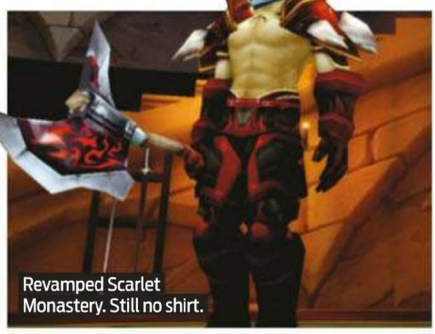
In Pandaria's lowlands, the tone is somewhat different. The Tillers are a faction of farmers whose land forms the breadbasket of the Pandaren empire. You'll earn favour with the Tillers by lending a hand, in what amounts to a full in-game version of console farming classic *Harvest Moon*. You'll get to own your own farm and choose which crops to plant, using abilities to boost the rate at which your plants grow. A different set of merchants will show up in the marketplace every day, each buying and selling different vegetables in return for faction. It's designed to be something ▸

WorldMags.net

Panda-themed drops for all races.


Certain scenarios are only available at night.

Careful, I think the one on the left has spotted us.


Revamped Scarlet Monastery. Still no shirt.

that players can lose themselves in, and it's part of the way that Blizzard are rethinking the faction grind for the expansion.

In the Vale of Eternal Blossoms, Blizzard are revisiting the success of *Cataclysm*'s Molten Front zone. Players will join the Golden Lotus faction in protecting Pandaria's most valuable artefacts from the Mantid, a new foe that dwells beyond the Great Wall that splits Pandaria from north to south. When you first join, you'll be limited to scouting work, but increasing your standing within the faction will relate directly to what quests you'll have access to and the importance of the missions you're entrusted with. "As you play each day, as you're earning faction, your base changes and grows. More people show up there for you," explains Stockton. "The dungeon that you go into – another wing opens up when you earn revered status, and that whole wing is full of separate quests, so it's not just 'I'm revered, I got a tabard'. It's 'I'm revered, I have new content'."

If you're interested in exploring Pandaria's history further, the Lorewalkers are a faction of record-keepers that reward exploration and the recovery of historical artefacts with new tales from the island's past. These aren't simply chunks of text, however: each new story is enacted as a play at the Lorewalkers' temple. It's a fun way to add life to what most games would treat as background fluff.

A new quest type, scenarios, also add flair to the faction grind. Scenarios are multi-

"As you're earning faction, your base changes and grows. More people show up"

stage phased group encounters that encourage a more reactive style of play than traditional *WoW*, setting you an array of objectives within an area and then encouraging you to approach them in your own way. Scenarios resemble *Guild Wars 2*'s events system, in that they allow players to throw themselves into battle without waiting for a group. They'll have their own queueing mechanism, and they're designed to be class-agnostic: you won't need a healer or a tank to succeed. Most scenarios are for five players, but the system currently supports up to 25 – so raid-scale phased quests are a possibility for the future.

Losing the magic triangle of healers, tanks and DPS is a big change, but it's one that's restricted to scenario play. "We feel really strongly about the healer-tank-DPS model that we have now," says Stockton. "It helps people have identity. If you're a good tank, it feels awesome to be a good tank and that's something that builds community. We don't want to lose that."

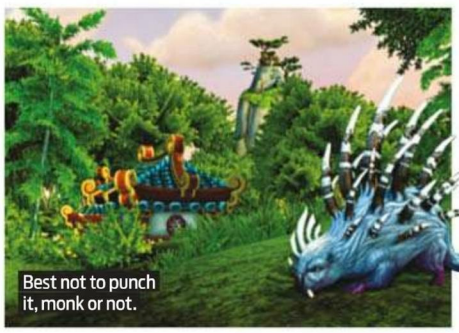
For players who have grown accustomed to *WoW*'s cooperative game, challenge modes will stress the importance of skillful play more than ever before. They're time-trial runs of existing dungeons with rewards for passing bronze, silver and gold thresholds. Achieving a full set of silver times will net you an exclusive suit of armour, and gold times are rewarded with a unique mount, Blizzard's take on a Chinese Shishi lion. When you post a time, your group composition will be recorded to both server and guild-wide

WorldMags.net

They never get tired of that pose.

The closest thing Azeroth has to a tranquil paradise.

Pandaren can be brown. Also, ladies.



Best not to punch it, monk or not.

leaderboards. Going down in history as the fastest, most efficient group on the server will be one of *WoW*'s most prestigious achievements for top-level players. The stats on your items are normalised for challenge mode runs, so the best gear won't be enough to get you a top time: you'll need skill, and four other people who know what they're doing.

New emphasis is being placed on visual rewards over boosts to your item score. "We've realised that by just increasing the item level, the art can continue to change on the tier sets but you're still only really seeing a small bump in your gear, it's not really changing your character as a whole," says Stockton. The phenomenal popularity of the transmogrification system, which allows players to swap the looks of one item for the stats of another, is, according to Stockton, "definitely intentional", and the reason that the challenge mode armour for each class comes with no stats by default.

If the system is popular, there's no reason it can't be rolled out to raids as well. Where the 'looking for raid' system has made high-end content less prestigious by opening the door to the casual masses, challenge modes will once again ensure that *WoW*'s elite have a way of distinguishing themselves. In practice, it feels like the best of both worlds: a way of celebrating commitment without locking a significant proportion of the player base out of the game's most exciting content.

"To get a top time you'll need skill – and four other people who know what they're doing"

Mists of Pandaria's PvP offering is less substantial. There'll be one new arena and two new battlegrounds, although the latter do demonstrate some innovative thinking. *WoW*'s first entirely indoor battleground, Silvershard Mines, takes place in a goblin diamond mine under Stranglethorn Vale, and players will compete to move a minecart from depot to depot in a way that resembles *Team Fortress 2*'s payload mode.

The other new battleground takes place in the Temple of Kot Mogu on Pandaria itself. Seizing control of an artefact will give one player on each team a huge buff to damage, reduce the amount that they can be healed, and give them the power to score points for their team based on where in the map they are. Fighting in the exposed centre earns more points, hiding on the fringes of the map earns less.

What impresses about *Mists of Pandaria* is not just the sheer amount of content: it's the critical eye that has been applied throughout. Blizzard have learned that simply adding dungeons isn't a compelling reason for players to stick with an 8-year-old MMO: they're comprehensively updating and rethinking the game in a way that makes it feel fresher, in many ways, than its younger contemporaries. The fact that the setting is so different from what has come before actually plays into its favour, in that regard. Pandaria isn't a retirement home for a veteran MMO: it's a sign that Blizzard still have exciting things to say about *World of Warcraft*. ■

Chris Thursten

Release 2012

WorldMags.net

Try saying "*PlanetSide 2*" without saying "epic".

PLANETSIDE 2

PLAYED IT Kicking the tyres of the most ambitious FPS ever made

PlanetSide 2 is an MMO and an FPS. It's about three factions waging war, with battles potentially including 600 players on each side, every one carrying personally customised weapons and driving vehicles on continents as large as 64km². It presents a balancing problem on par with *StarCraft 2*, and it's the most ambitious FPS I've ever seen. Yet all I want to do in it is be a guy that drives an unarmed transport truck.

I want to be relied upon to get 10 men where they need to go, yell something encouraging over voice chat when they dismount, and nothing else. I want to know nuances of the southern zones of the Indar continent, and be able to tell you why a valley insertion from the north-east is safest.

I want to be a good combat bus driver, and *PlanetSide 2* might actually support my obscure fantasy, along with dozens of other player-authored roles. Maybe you'd rather be a medic, or an anti-air specialist. If they get it right, *PlanetSide 2* will provide personal experiences unprecedented in other shooters.

Deciding that *PlanetSide 2* is a shooter is a good move by Sony Online. Making something that straddles the middle of the MMOFPS acronym creates compromises that upsets fans of both genres, and SOE get that. "We're an FPS game first," says creative director Matt Higby.

"We have realistic ballistics in the game: bullets do drop over time, they lose damage"

Still, there's the lure of those vehicles. Higby puts me behind the wheel of a Terran ATV. It's not a combat bus, but it's heartening the way the bike's wheels forget their traction a bit when I make a hard turn at high speed. And that I can freelook while driving. And that the UI shows what gear I'm in. And that I can strap C4 to the headlights and make my bike into a bomb. And further, that I'll be able to decide in that vehicle's certification tree – *PlanetSide 2*'s skill system – if I'd rather have a high horsepower, low torque spec or level-up a high torque, low horsepower variant for hill-climbing.

To balance the depth of these trees, *PlanetSide 2* is abandoning the fully customisable loadouts of the original in favour of distinct classes. "In *PlanetSide*, you would see some dude and you'd have no idea what they were able to do to you. Having that predictability of, 'I see that guy, he's an engineer, I know he can do these few things to me' – that's critical."

SOE only put a few weapons in my hands during my visit to the studio, but *PS2*'s weapon handling fell somewhere between *Borderlands* and *Tribes*. I could rack up an easy kill at medium range by shamelessly holding down Mouse 1 with the New Conglomerate's Gauss Assault Rifle, but after about two seconds my crosshair would spike 45° and I'd be completely off-target. "We do have realistic ballistics in the game. Bullets do drop over time, they do lose damage over time. We don't have some of the stuff like,

READ ME
PUBLISHER Sony Online
DEVELOPER Sony Online
LINK planetside2.com

WorldMags.net

The first *PlanetSide* saw hundreds of players fight on the same map – this time it could be thousands.

These battles could go on for weeks, so make sure you've packed a change of undies.

Those guys in the New Conglomerate get the best-looking ships.

say, penetration. How much simulation can you be doing when you're talking about potentially millions of bullets flying around at once?"

As a Light Assault I could activate a jump-pack to bounce over an outer wall, or spring over the head of a foe in a face-to-face shootout, daring them to try to finish me off mid-air while one of my teammates dealt the killing blow. When I spawn as a MAX suit – *PlanetSide*'s equivalent of mechs – I blast away at scattered infantry with separate weapons assigned to each mouse button. The stopping power of my chaingun arm and grenade arm is offset by a rigid turning rate; any circle-strafing player can outmanoeuvre me.

"MAXs will continue to be fearsome units" but will "require support, coordination and teamwork to really reach their full potential", says Higby.

Even from this hour spent in a six-person, contextless skirmish, well below what *PlanetSide*'s average battle will be, there's plenty of complexity. Higby earns an eyebrow-raise out of me when he starts talking about the different missile lock mechanics they'll be adding, "from heat-seeking to camera-guided to laser-guided, and all those will be different upgrades that you can use."

What I don't have a sense of is whether that experience will hold up at a scale of hundreds of players, each with different intentions and expertise, all trying to be heroes. Creating spaces that sustain firefights of completely different scales is one of *PlanetSide*'s daunting design puzzles. One prong of SOE's approach to this is specialized geography: terrain that's suited to different combat. Sure, you can fly your 12-player Galaxy transport anywhere you like, but you may want to avoid regions where air fighters cloud together like so many rocket-toting gnats.

SOE won't be drawn on a beta or release date yet, but if I had to guess I'd say it'll be 2013 before all of this is finished. There's just so much to get right. If they can manage that balance though, then whenever the game does launch, you'll find me right in the middle of things, driving soldiers to the battlefields of Indar. ■

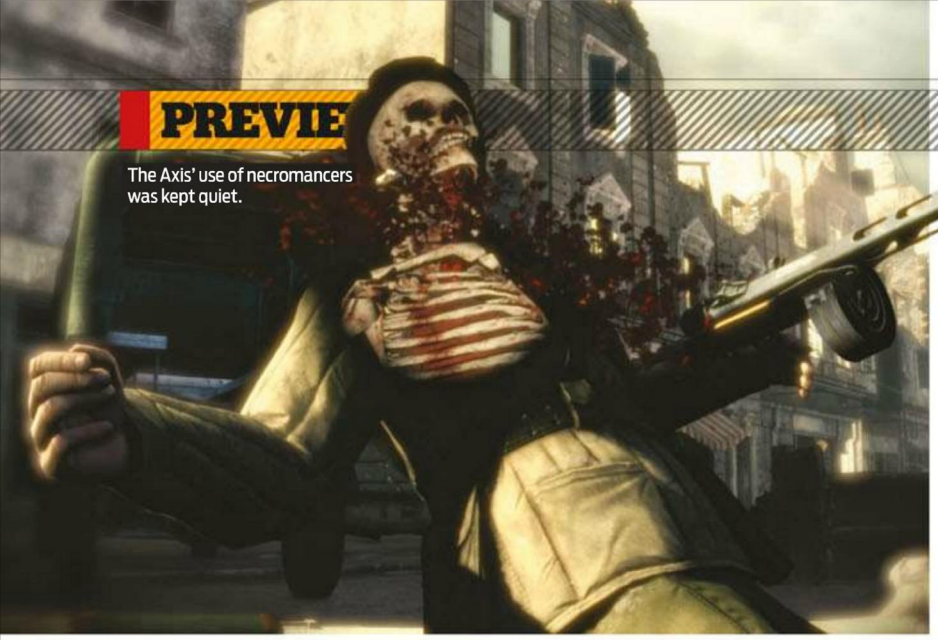
Evan Lahti

"Call a medic! I've just burst my excitement gland!

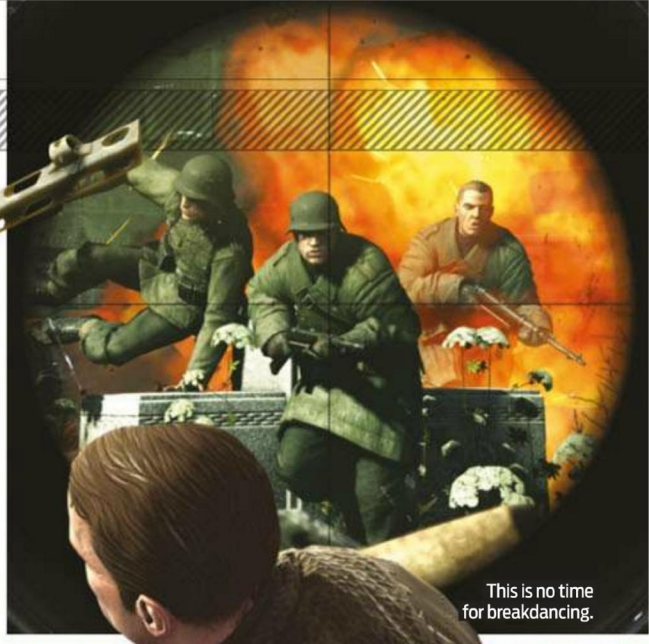
Air and ground vehicles will fight alongside the troops.

Release 2013

WorldMags.net



The Axis' use of necromancers was kept quiet.



This is no time for breakdancing.

Arguing about who gets to sit in the sidecar.

SNIPER ELITE V2

PLAYED IT Aim for the family jewels in Rebellion's sharpshooter semi-sim.

Thanks to *Sniper Elite V2*, I now know I *really* don't want to be shot in the testicles. Rebellion's sniper sort-of-sim – a reboot of 2005's *Sniper Elite* that's more physically and historically accurate than its World War 2 peers, but with its sights set on the realms of sharpshooting fantasy – models gonad destruction in excruciating detail. Should one of your bullets take the low road into an enemy's crotchal region, you're treated to a slow-mo view of both of their testicles popping in quick succession.

I'm feeling woozy just typing this out. It's not just danglers, either. Watch as someone plays *Sniper Elite V2* and you're treated to a short biology course, taught by a psychotic professor desperate to test bullet effects on every organ and bone in the human body. *Sniper Elite V2*'s good shots – bullets to the head, shots to the major organs on moving targets, and so on – trigger a kill-cam that renders your shot and its effects in lavish slow-motion. It's a grisly effect, one that the game's technical advisor – a historian of sniping through the ages – originally wasn't keen on.

The second I realised I could dish out this kind of damage, I aimed for the goolies every chance I got. Fortunately for my AI opponents, *Sniper Elite V2*'s sniping isn't as simple as clicking on crotches. Wind and gravity affect bullets to exuberant levels: fire over 100m and you'll have to aim a notch above your target.

"You're treated to a slow-mo view of their testicles popping in quick succession"

Sniper Elite's American sniper Karl Fairburne scurries around a broken Berlin in third person, plugging entire enemy patrols. He has a submachine gun and a suppressed pistol for close-range duties, but his rifle's the star. At one point, after battling through street-level guardposts, Fairburne makes his way to the top of a church tower. Up there, he discovers a German Gewehr 43 rifle, and takes a few seconds to lovingly describe the make, model, and calibre of bullets the gun uses. After he's finished cooing, he turns it on the troops massing below.

They're all easy kills: his elevation means heads are easily visible, and the enemy AI isn't shy about running out into the open, exposing their soft and inviting testicles. But a bigger challenge rumbles forward in the form of a tank. Luckily, Karl picks out the vehicle's fuel tanks: a carefully aimed bullet scrapes the cap from one of them, and the whole thing goes up.

This shot – like all the game's killshots – earns Karl points. A kilometre-plus headshot gets you 2000-odd points; a 2m pistol kill yields a paltry 50. These points are incongruous with the ballistic and historical accuracy of the rest of the game, but will separate *Sniper Elite*'s sniper elites from the rest of the pack. The best snipers will stick to hiding places, get elevation, and distract guards with rocks to squeeze maximum points from every death. ■

Rich McCormick

READ ME

PUBLISHER
Rebellion Developments

DEVELOPER
Rebellion Developments

LINK
sniperelitev2.com

Release MAY 4

WorldMags.net

SPECIAL OFFER ENDS 30/04/12!

SERVER POWER
SCALABLE BY THE HOUR

Demands that change by the hour?
1&1 has a server to match!

- **NEW:** Pay-per-configuration by the hour. **Increase or decrease capacity** as needed with precise **billing to the nearest hour**
- **NEW:** Add virtual machines as you need them by the hour
- **NEW:** Server monitoring and management via web browser or mobile app
- **NEW:** Up to **6 CPU**, up to **24 GB RAM** and up to **800 GB** of hard disk space
- Dedicated server environment with full root access
- Linux or Windows operating system with pre-installed Parallels® Plesk Panel 10.4
- Includes 1 SSL Certificate for secure transactions
- Hosted in secure, high-performance 1&1 data centres
- 24/7 phone and e-mail support

1&1 DYNAMIC CLOUD SERVER

3 MONTHS FREE!*

Then starting at £29.99 per month

1&1

MEMBER OF united internet

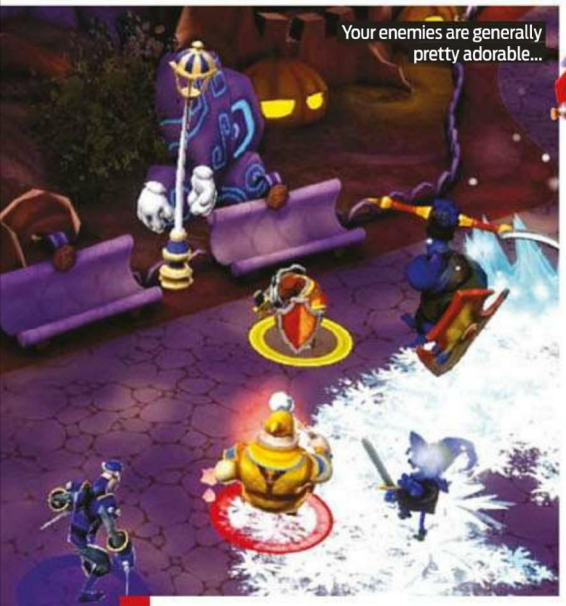
Call **0844 335 1211** or buy online

www.1and1.co.uk

* Basic configuration free for 3 months. Higher configurations are priced at the difference between the base configuration and the desired configuration. 12 month minimum contract term applies. Visit www.1and1.co.uk for full promotional offer details, terms and conditions. Prices exclude VAT.

Watch out! It's a... cute purple snuffleupagus.

We're not sure whether to kill it or pet it.



Your enemies are generally pretty adorable...

...but they still make a bloody mess when you kill them.

DUNGEONLAND

FIRST LOOK You must be this tall to ride Paradox's latest co-op dungeon.

The expression 'theme park' is usually a pejorative when applied to RPGs. It means cut-and-paste quests, predictable twists and ponderous attempts at spectacle. Brazil-based developers Critical Studio have come up with an interesting solution to a long-standing problem: make an RPG that is set in an actual theme park.

It's either brilliant or madness – which is appropriate, given that *Dungeonland*'s eponymous park is the creation of (ahem) The Evil Lord Dungeon Master, a villain tired of having heroes sabotage his diabolical schemes. In order to distract the do-gooders, he sets about building a series of adventure playgrounds they won't be able to resist – and neither, Critical Studio are hoping, will you.

READ ME
PUBLISHER
Paradox Interactive
DEVELOPER
Critical Studio
LINK
paradoxplaza.com/games/dungeonland

There's a streak of knowing humour running through *Dungeonland* that publishers Paradox are hoping will win it the same kind of cult following that *Magicka*, its stablemate and fellow isometric fantasy action game, enjoys. *Dungeonland* has a little more traditional RPG DNA than its cousin – it's class-based and loot plays a major role – but its stages send up fantasy staples in a similar way.

You control one of three adventurers – a mage, a thief or a warrior – in three-player co-op across a series of themed campaigns.

> **"*Dungeonland* takes more than a few cues from *Diablo*'s stream of monsters to beat up"**

Action is fast paced and *Dungeonland* takes more than a few cues from *Diablo*'s steady stream of monsters to beat up and bits and bobs to collect.

Each player has a distinct role based on the weapons available to them. The warrior's shield can be used to knock back enemies, for example, clearing space for the wizard's magic attacks. Boss battles take after *World of Warcraft*, with screen-filling enemies that require particular techniques to counter their predictable attack patterns. The enemies you run into are randomised in the manner of *Left 4 Dead* – an invisible system that adjusts the composition and strength of monsters in order to maintain a challenge that matches your skill level.

One of the most interesting things about the game is that this role can be taken on by a fourth human player – they become the Dungeon Master and attempt to hinder the other three as best they can. It's an asymmetric version of *Left 4 Dead*'s competitive mode mixed with the real-time scenario building of *Neverwinter Nights*, and it could be *Dungeonland*'s stand-out feature. The Dungeon Master can also assume direct control of boss monsters to give those fights an extra edge.

Dungeonland will launch with three campaigns, each lasting roughly an hour. Keeping things small-scale is a smart move: hopefully it'll make for a smoother launch than *Magicka*'s. Critical Studio are betting on the fact that, as much as serious RPG fans might not like to admit it, theme parks are designed to be fun. ■

Chris Thursten

Release 2012

WorldMags.net

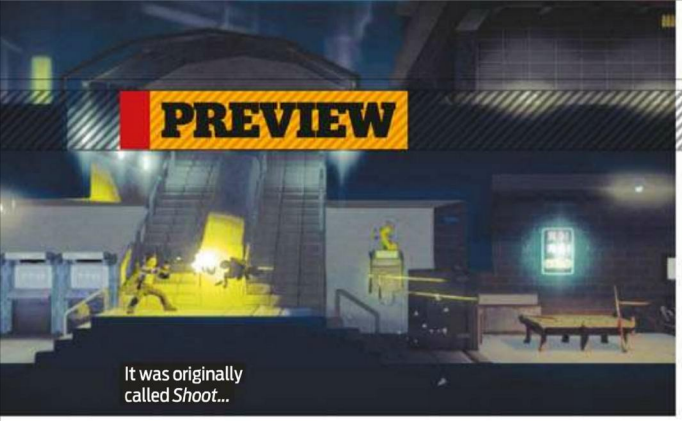
LIKE A MAGAZINE. BUT FOR YOUR EARS.

PC GAMER PODCAST

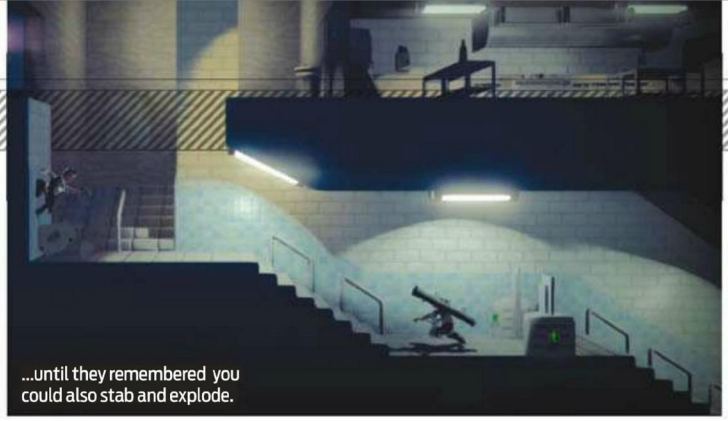
THE PC GAMER PODCAST
SEARCH "PC GAMER UK PODCAST"

THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PC GAMES MAGAZINE
PC GAMER

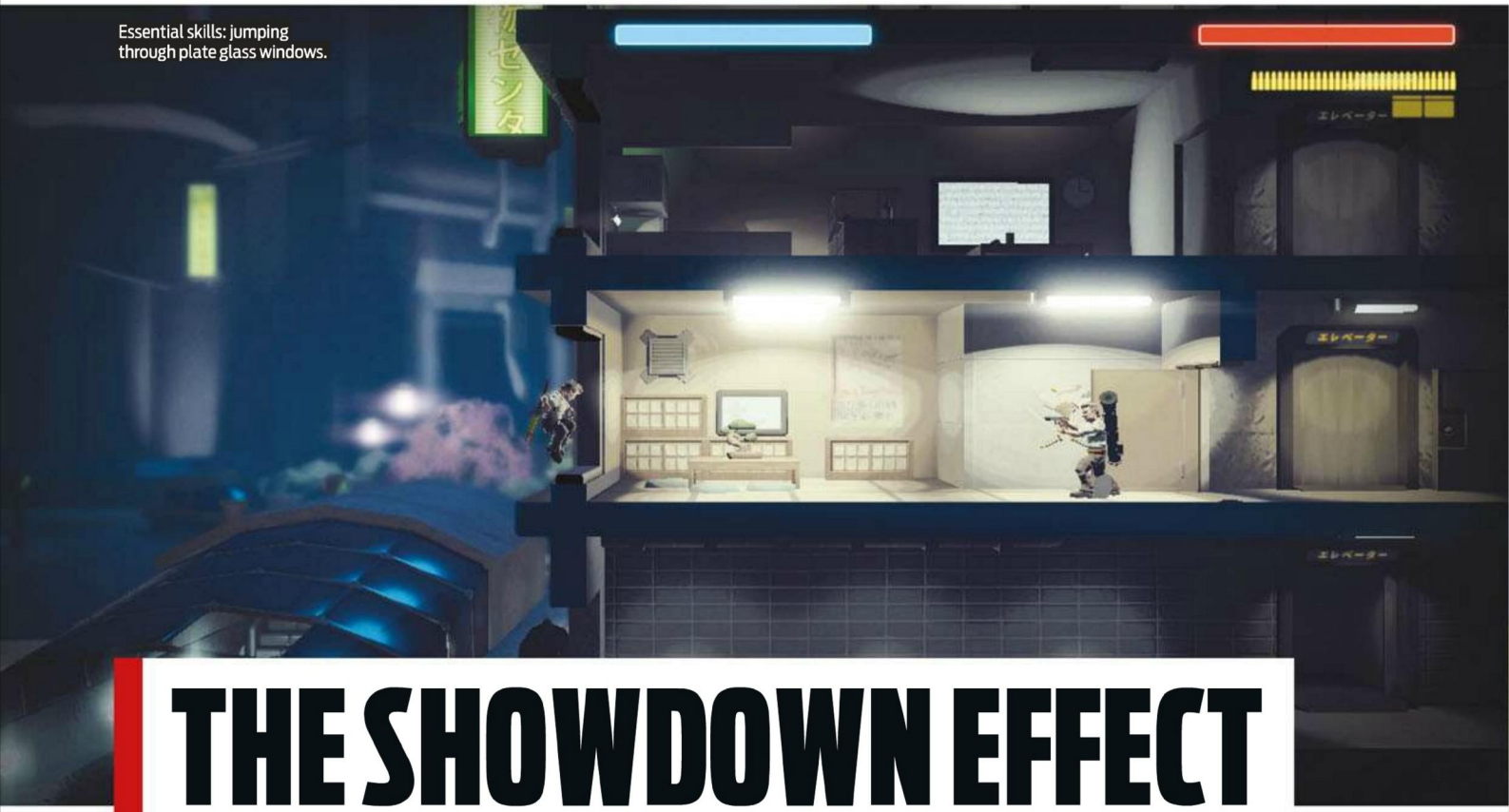
WorldMags.net



It was originally called *Shoot*...



...until they remembered you could also stab and explode.



Essential skills: jumping through plate glass windows.

THE SHOWDOWN EFFECT

PLAYED IT Dodge bullets and fight friends in a world of '80s action movies.

I am sad. My identity has been stolen from me by a series of coldhearted government functionaries who are out to silence me because I Know Too Much. I am sad because, like an inverted Socrates, the only thing that I know is that I don't know what it is that I know that is Too Much. I express my sadness by barrel-rolling through a fourth-story window – narrowly dodging an exploding RPG as I do – and springing off the walls on the way down.

As I catch my breath, a hail of machinegun fire erupts from a nearby alley; I frantically backflip around the bullet stream before dodging into a kitchen. I hear footsteps coming closer. Both my assailant and I unload our Uzis at each other, alternately dodging and firing, until our ammo is spent. It's then that we grab the knives and the furnishings. I finally finish off him off with a barstool. Only six more to go, I think, as I start bandaging up my bleeding limbs.

READ ME
PUBLISHER
Paradox
DEVELOPER
Arrowhead Studios/ Pixeldiet Entertainment
LINK
bit.ly/showpcg

"*The Showdown Effect* is very heavily inspired by '80s action movies," says Emil Englund, the design director at Arrowhead. The team previously responsible for chaotic co-op RPG *Magicka* are now bringing their talents to bear on this eight-player, side-scrolling arena shooter. "The whole idea behind the game is to experience that outrageousness, the coolness and one-liners."

> **"The only thing I know is that I don't know what it is that I know that is Too Much"**

Player characters are agile as hell; a double-tap makes them sprint, and they can slide, roll, dive and jump, blasting away all the time. Englund hopes to have the dive function improved in the final game, so you can dive *at* other players and knock their weapons out of their hands, or even knock them through windows.

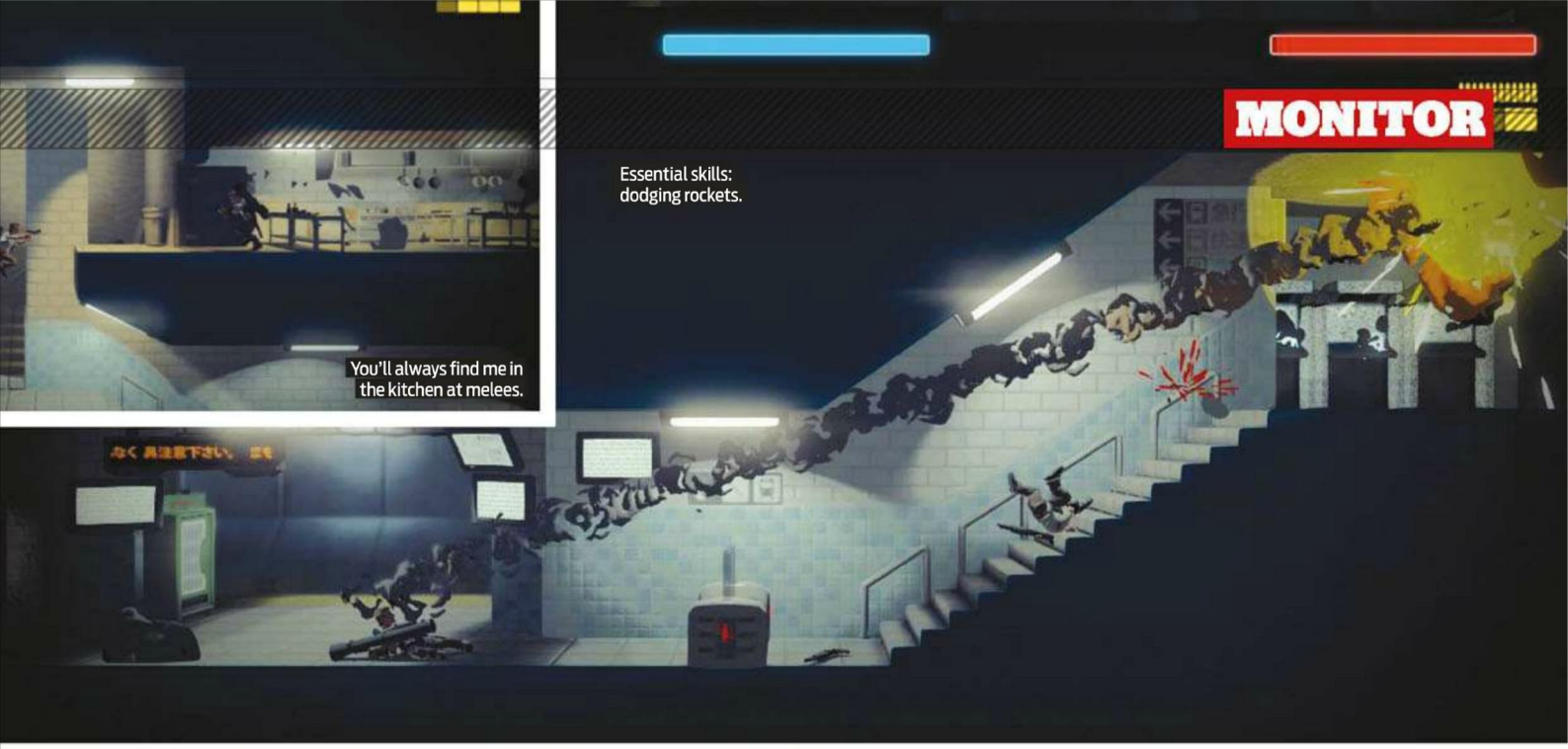
On top of this, the key dodge button renders you invulnerable as long as you hold it down, and uses up a blue meter. It increases the lifetime of the players substantially – as long as they remember to use it. Get hit and you might start bleeding, necessitating stopping and bandaging – not something you want to do when there are seven other action heroes running around the level who know where you are.

This agility is necessary given two things: the absolute anime overblowness of the weapon-fire animations (inspired by *Ghost in the Shell*), which means players will unload clip after clip just for the look of the thing (before tossing the empty gun at the opponent in order to stun them – there's no reloading in '80s action flicks) and the presence of rocket launchers, which are super-slow loading, firing, aiming, area-effect kills. "When you hit a wall, you're not meant to feel like you missed someone – you're supposed to feel like you hit the wall."

Englund tells us that, although the initial arsenal will be traditional gritty '80s kit – shotguns, Uzis, M16s, assault rifles,

WorldMags.net

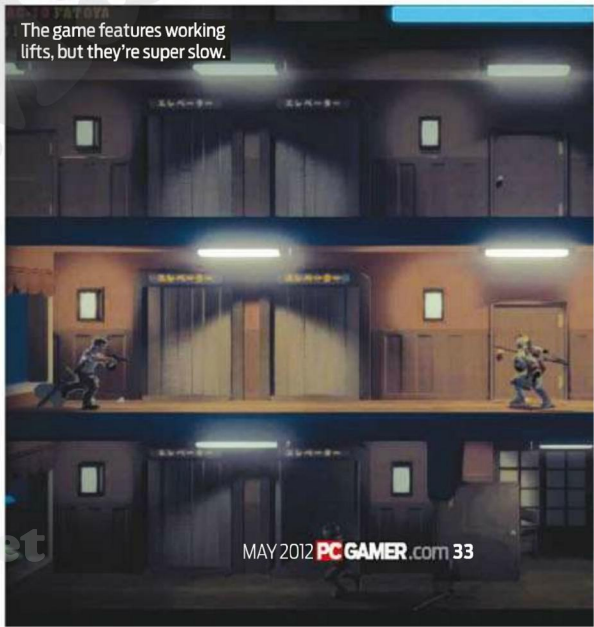
You'll always find me in the kitchen at melees.


Essential skills: dodging rockets.

David Copperfield, special agent.

I look up to him, because he's plummeting.

We're going to need more guns.


The game features working lifts, but they're super slow.

grenades, katanas – they may introduce more esoteric killing devices later, including laser guns, Gauss guns, lightsabers and a guided missile.

Players can also grab environmental objects to finish off their enemies, such as fire extinguishers, frying pans, broomsticks, barstools and kitchen knives. "The whole point of the combat is that it's contextualised," Englund says. "Everything makes you feel like you're creating that cinematic scene."

Another key device is the one-liner. Though it wasn't included in the build I got to play, players will be able to quip to buff themselves or complete game objectives. "In certain game modes, you earn points for pulling off one-liners at certain moments," Englund says. "Or you may regain health when bandaging and using a one-liner, because you're just that tough. I think the original inspiration is *Action: Quake II*."

Several game modes are promised, before the straight Last Man Standing I saw, but the team can't give us more details yet. "Of course we will have game modes that reward certain styles of play," Englund says, "but it's important that you feel like you didn't do something for points – you did it because it felt right."

There will be DLC, although it's likely to be just visual and audio customisations, such as extra characters to play with. The various names that the team threw at us included the Stolen Identity Guy (outrageous Austrian accent), the Tired New York Cop (day before retirement), the Trenchcoat Guy – and there will be as many female as male archetypes, with their own voices and one-liners. Characters will progress outside of the combat arena to unlock even more customisation options.

There will only be two settings at launch, each having multiple levels including the grimy eight-floor neo-Tokyo apartment block that I saw, which was straight out of a Hong Kong action movie. We're told that the other setting is Medieval England. Further levels will be given away as free DLC which, given the mooted £10 price, is very generous indeed. ■

Dan Griliopoulos

Release AUTUMN

WorldMags.net

It's best not to bring stink bombs to a firefight.

END OF NATIONS

PLAYED IT *End of Nations* is an RTS with a rich, moreish MMO centre

Nations are overrated. What's the point of having tiny wars between neighbouring countries when everyone could band together for a global punch-up?

Petroglyph and Trion Worlds are trying to build the biggest multiplayer RTS game ever, and it's going to be free to play. *End of Nations* will let you assemble an army of 20 units, join one of future-Earth's two player-controlled factions and fight alongside dozens of players in battles of more than a thousand troops. With every battle you'll level up and gain new ways to customise your army, and every victory will help your faction take territory in the grand campaign for control of planet Earth.

End of Nations is set in the aftermath of a global economic meltdown masterminded by the sinister Order of Nations, a cabal of high-level political moles and rogue generals determined to unify the faltering nations of the world under their authoritarian rule. After systematically driving the planet's individual nations into decay, they've installed a worldwide dictatorship that's determined to become rich and make everyone's lives a bit of a misery.

READ ME
PUBLISHER
Trion Worlds
DEVELOPER
Petroglyph
LINK
bit.ly/a8uHQr

The Order of Nations is the AI-controlled faction that you'll get to beat up throughout *End of Nations*' co-op campaign. Two rebellious groups have broken off to oppose the Order. The Shadow Revolution reckon the Order's oppressive regime has gone a bit far, and wants to install a nicer dictatorship with more hugs and ice cream for everyone. The Liberation Front want to replace the Order's top brass with an elected parliament. Both factions plan to force the Order to cooperate using brute force.

> **"*End of Nations* takes place on Earth in the aftermath of a global economic meltdown"**

As a budding general in The Liberation Front or the Shadow Revolution, you can take to the battlefield to fight for your cause with a carefully customised army of up to 20 units. You can assemble your force from a wide range of troops, including rocket-spewing VTOL jets, hulking tanks, long-range artillery pieces and fragile men in mech suits. You can unlock more options on your tech tree, which gives you a way to spend the experience and credits you've earned reducing enemies to molten slag on the battlefield.

The battles themselves are destructive and quick. There's no base building in *End of Nations*; your troops are air-dropped in at the start of the battle. When one of your units dies, you can use credits earned killing enemies to call in a fresh one right away. *End of Nations* goes out of its way to feel fresh and accessible for newcomers. There are no build orders to learn, no economy to balance and no resources to gather. On the front lines, good teamwork and organisation win out over precision micromanagement and clicks-per-minute.

It's a combat system designed to win over RTS players put off by the demanding learning curve of *StarCraft II* or the precise economic juggling of *Supreme Commander*.

WorldMags.net

MONITOR

He realised that he could never drive the car, and was the saddest robot ever.

Scaredy tanks hide behind sandbags.

Some cities are still intact, others are complete ruins.

"We think a lot of people that used to play strategy games and RTS games have moved away because the genre hasn't changed," explains senior producer, Chris Lena. "In some ways it's become more hardcore over time. We think we've solved some of those problems."

To do this, *End of Nations* casts aside the meta-strategy elements that complicate so many RTSs, instead letting players focus on the fun part: making the bad guys blow up.

Resource management and building may be gone, but that doesn't mean fights are straightforward. Each type of unit is especially effective against another. Artillery can murder infantry en masse and tanks can massacre light vehicles and tear through artillery. Positioning your troops to outrange the enemy is a useful way to gain an advantage, but to realise each unit's potential you'll have to learn to use their unique powers effectively.

Every unit type has one ability. Artillery pieces can use Overwatch to pulverise a point of your choosing, heavy tanks can go hull-down and turtle up near control points, making them exceptionally hard to kill. VTOL birds can level an area with a barrage of warheads. Each ability has a cooldown attached. Knowing when to let rip with these powers and when to shelve them and retreat is an important part of winning in *End of Nations*.

Multiplayer maps will have players fighting for control points scattered across a range of crumbling cityscapes. As you roll your men towards the nearest control point, there is just enough time to appreciate each map's finer details. Tiny birds fly overhead and the remnants of tattered national flags of the country you're fighting in hang from cracked windows.

"It casts aside meta-strategy and lets you focus on the fun part: blowing up bad guys"

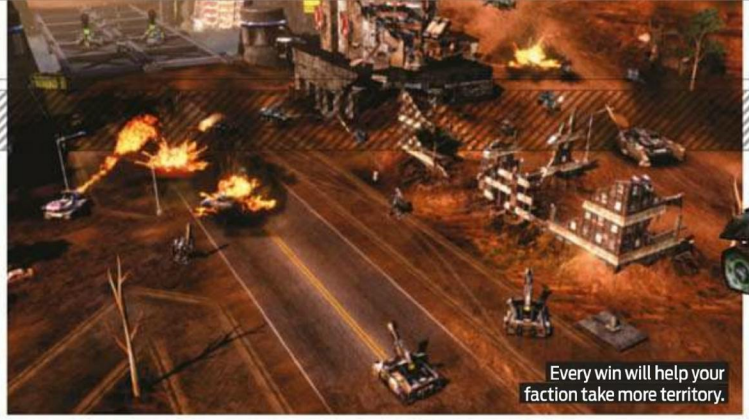
Each map is set in a modern city that's fallen into disrepair. Narrow streets and bridges provide chokepoints, and wide open squares and levelled terrain surround exposed control points. Lumbering heavy tanks and well-placed artillery are useful for holding areas, but once you've taken a point, friendly gun emplacements will spring up nearby. These bolster your defences and free up your units to go on the offensive.

When the time comes to make a push, teamwork is vital. Your individual unit abilities are good at dealing heavy damage, but you also have access to a number of general command skills. These cooldown-heavy powers can offer game-changing advantages. There's one that can repair your units in the field, saving you the time it'd take to air drop a replacement into your deployment zone. Another increases the armour of all friendly units within a huge radius – that's really useful for keeping an outnumbered force alive while reinforcements swarm in to join the fight.

You'll jump into fights by accessing them on the global campaign map. Victory in each location will count towards your faction's overall standing there. If one faction gains a significant advantage over the other, that faction will gain control of that part of the world. That'll increase ▸

WorldMags.net

Unit mods can make all the difference in close fights.



Every win will help your faction take more territory.

One of *End of Nations'* smaller skirmishes.

the loot and credits earned by everyone who fights for that faction. Battles will range from four-on-four skirmishes up to 52-player barneys fought between up to 1,040 player-controlled units.

The 52-player maps weren't ready when I had the chance to play *End of Nations*, but Lena says that players will have to capture advanced deployment zones to keep up with the changing battle lines. In order to get enough players together to test the maps, Petroglyph and Trion Worlds have taken to the field several times to fight against each other. Lena won't be drawn on which studio is currently in the lead, but it's hard to imagine the ex-Westwood devs at Petroglyph being beaten at their own game.

End of Nations reflects the curious mix of talent behind it: the seasoned *Command & Conquer* vets at Petroglyph are building a smart, addictive RTS and Trion Worlds are backing it with the strong online infrastructure they learned building *Rift*. The MMO influences are plain to see.

There's a strong layer of persistence behind every battle. *End of Nations* is bringing the MMO genre's most moreish elements to the RTS – loot and levelling. As you advance along the tech tree, you'll gain credits that you can use to buy stat-boosting mods for your units. Each unit will have three mod sockets, which leaves plenty of room for obsessive stat tinkering. You'll earn mods in loot chests picked up after every scrap. The quality of the loot will vary depending on how high you were in the leaderboard when the battle ended.

"Petroglyph and Trion Worlds have taken to the field several times to fight each other"

You can also buy vivid camo patterns that'll let you paint your tanks to look like deadly iron zebras. The developers haven't laid out exactly how microtransactions will work, but we'll surely be able to buy many of these mods and paint jobs when the full game goes live.

After the release of the PvP build, there's a huge co-op campaign planned for *End of Nations*. There are already small survival maps in the game, that see you holding off waves of Order of Nations troops and capturing optional points to secure extra command abilities.

There's even a competitive survival mode in which you and another player will fight separate survival battles on the same map. You won't be able to send troops to affect your opponent's fight but you can use air strikes and EMP bombs secured from these out of the way optional points to scupper your competitor's defences.

The full co-op campaign will go well beyond these small scraps. You'll be travelling through maps, completing objectives and striking at the heart of The Order with friends. Some of these will take place on the same scale as *End of Nations'* most expansive PvP battles.

You'll assault the field with dozens of allied players on huge maps akin to MMO zones, dodging environmental challenges and taking on multi-stage boss fights to unlock new gear.

End of Nations will need a big player base to support these sizeable quests, which is

WorldMags.net

Heavy tanks make short work of buggies.

VTOL jets can quickly back up beleagured units.

Battles are fast and suprisingly pretty.

one of the reasons that it's being built as a free-to-play game. The promise of thousand-unit warzones are sure to lure plenty of players in, and the accessible combat and addictive levelling systems provide plenty of reasons to stick around, but Trion reckon that it takes more to keep players interested. They want people to meet up, form groups and make friends.

I ask Chris Lena about the MMO elements that are resonating most with RTS players. "We find that what's really worked is a lot of the social features," he says. "Like clan mechanics, chat, friends lists, being able to find groups together. We want as many people as possible in the game because it makes it more fun for everyone else."

"We're fans of MMORPGs and other games that have been getting a lot of people together," he adds. "I think in a lot of games the most fun is other people, right? That's definitely a big part of it."

End of Nations might just draw the audience it needs, but its future isn't entirely certain. It's already fun but could face a rocky road nonetheless. Free-to-play real-time strategy games aren't common, and there have been disasters. Relic tried to take one of the best RTS games in the world and re-release it as a free-to-play RTS with *Company of Heroes Online*, but the servers were closed down and the project shelved before it ever received a wide release. *Age of Empires Online* is one of the few other attempts to re-craft an

"I think in a lot of games the most fun is other people, right? That's a big part of it"

intimidating genre into something palatable to a wider audience. *Age of Empires* tried to do this by layering a colourful aesthetic over a very old-fashioned RTS, but *End of Nations* is building a combat system much closer to the overlooked but excellent *World in Conflict*. It's built from the ground up to be fast, attractive and easy to get stuck into.

It also has something else over *Age of Empires*: tanks. Futuristic tanks, to be precise. The game engine can deliver the satisfying, crunchy explosions needed to make these mighty units feel powerful. Air strikes pummel units into oblivion with thunderous flair and the engine conjures up satisfying, blossoming explosions. You can construct layers and layers of levelling systems around an RTS, but they'll never be able to compensate for damp, static combat. The devs behind *End of Nations* understand this well.

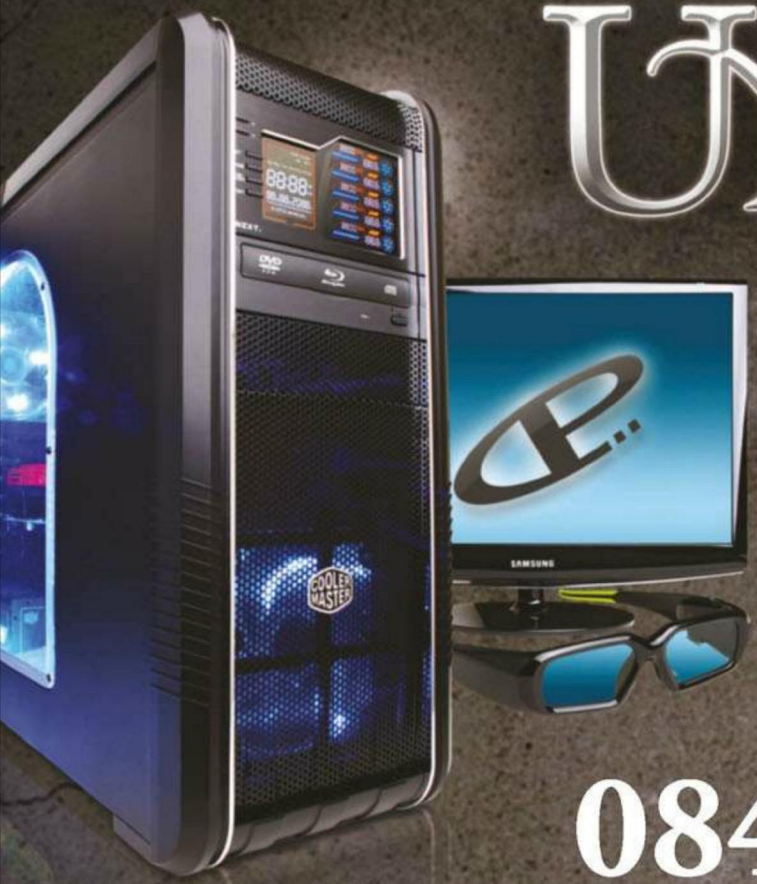
The levels of unpredictability added by the unit mod system mean that *End of Nations* will struggle to deliver anything like the kind of top-level competition we've seen in games like *StarCraft 2*, and its streamlined systems may feel a little too slim for veteran RTS gamers, but Petroglyph aren't trying to deliver a new e-sport – they're trying to deliver something tactical, punchy and bloody good fun.

This isn't an RTS that *StarCraft 2* fans will play, it's a game that shooter fans will play. If they pull it off, they could be onto something big. ■

Tom Senior

Release SUMMER

WorldMags.net



CYBERPOWER

UNLEASH THE POWER

Create the PC of your dream

All Desktop systems come with 3 year Limited Warranty

0844 371 2727

Water Cooling as standard on all Cyberpower Gaming Desktops

To Custom Build Your Ideal Desktop or Laptop, Visit :
WWW.CYBERPOWERSYSTEM.CO.UK

INFINITY HERCULES GT

Extreme Performance Gaming Station
Intel Core i7-2600K Processor @ 4.8Ghz !

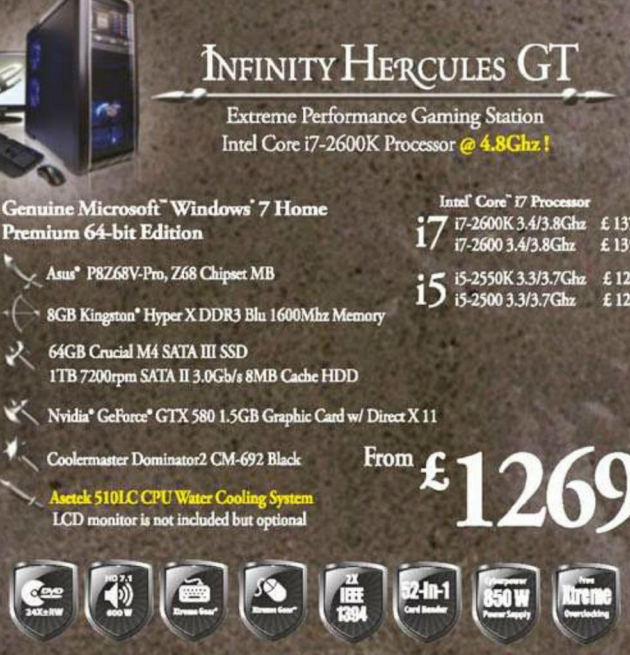
Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition

- Asus® P8Z68V-Pro, Z68 Chipset MB
- 8GB Kingston® Hyper X DDR3 Blu 1600Mhz Memory
- 64GB Crucial M4 SATA III SSD
  1TB 7200rpm SATA II 3.0Gb/s 8MB Cache HDD
- Nvidia® GeForce® GTX 580 1.5GB Graphic Card w/ Direct X 11
- Coolermaster Dominator2 CM-692 Black
- Asetek 510LC CPU Water Cooling System
  LCD monitor is not included but optional

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

i7	i7-2600K 3.4/3.8Ghz	£ 1375
	i7-2600 3.4/3.8Ghz	£ 1355
i5	i5-2550K 3.3/3.7Ghz	£ 1279
	i5-2500 3.3/3.7Ghz	£ 1269

From £1269



INFINITY HERCULES

A Media Dream for Photo/Video Editing
2nd Generation Intel® Core Processor

Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition

- Asus® P8Z68-V LX Z68 Chipset MB
- 8GB Corsair® DDR3 1333Mhz Memory
- 1TB 7200rpm SATAII 3.0Gb/s 16MB HDD
- Nvidia® GeForce® GTX560 1GB Graphic Card w/ Direct X 11
- NZXT Hush 2 Mid Tower Black
- Asetek 510LC CPU Water Cooling System
  LCD monitor is not included but optional

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

i7	i7-2600K 3.4/3.8Ghz	£ 935
	i7-2600 3.4/3.8Ghz	£ 915
i5	i5-2550K 3.3/3.7Ghz	£ 839
	i5-2500 3.3/3.7Ghz	£ 835
	i5-2400 3.1/3.4Ghz	£ 819
	i5-2300 2.8/3.1Ghz	£ 815
i3	i3-2120 3.3Ghz	£ 759

From £759

Cyberpower recommends Coolermaster

Celeron, Celeron Inside, Centrino, Centrino Inside, Centrino Logo, Core Inside, Intel, Intel Logo, Intel Core, Intel Inside, Intel Inside Logo, Intel Viiv, Intel vPro, Itanium, Itanium Inside, Pentium, Pentium Inside, Viiv Inside, vPro Inside, Xeon, and Xeon Inside are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and other countries. All prices are subject to change without notice or obligation. CyberPower is not responsible for any typographical and photographic errors. Copyright ©2008 CyberPower. All rights reserved.

NVIDIA®, nForce®, GeForce®, SLI™ are trademarks or registered trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries. CyberPower PCs use genuine Microsoft® Windows® • www.microsoft.com/piracy/howtotell

WorldMags.net

Infinity Xtreme

Extreme CPU & VGA Water Cooling Gaming Monster
Intel® Core™ i7-3960X Processor

Genuine Microsoft® Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition

- Asus® P9X79 PRO DDR3 with SATA III, USB3
- 16GB Kingston® Hyper X DDR3 Blu 1600Mhz Memory
- 64GB Crucial M4 SATA III SSD
  1TB 7200rpm SATA II 3.0Gb/s 8MB Cache HDD
- Nvidia® GTX 590 3GB Water Cooled Graphic Card w/ Direct X 11
- CoolerMaster HAF 912 Gaming Tower Case w/Side-Panel Window
- Asetek 510LC CPU Water Cooling System
  LCD monitor is not included but optional

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor
i7 i7-3960X 3.30Ghz 15MB £ 2559
i7-3930K 3.20Ghz 12MB £ 2139
i7-3820K 3.60Ghz 10MB £ 1859

From £1859

Infinity Hercules SE

Great Value for Money Home PC with Water Cooling
Intel® Core™ i3 Processor

Genuine Microsoft® Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition

- Asus® P8Z68-V LX Z68 Chipset MB
- 4GB Kingston® DDR3 1333Mhz Memory
- 1TB 7200rpm SATA II 3.0Gb/s 8MB Cache HDD
- AMD® Radeon™ 6770 1 GB Graphic Card
- Thermaltake Commander Mid-Tower Case
- Asetek 510LC CPU Water Cooling System
  LCD monitor is not included but optional

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor
i7 i7-2600K 3.4/3.8Ghz £ 805
i7-2600 3.4/3.8Ghz £ 785

i5 i5-2550K 3.4/3.8Ghz £ 709
i5-2500 3.3/3.7Ghz £ 705
i5-2400 3.1/3.4Ghz £ 689
i5-2300 2.8/3.1Ghz £ 685

i3 i3-2120 3.3Ghz £ 629

From £629

Infinity Level 10

High Performance All-Rounder
Intel® 2nd Generation Core Processor

Genuine Microsoft® Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition

- Asus P9X79 PRO DDR3 with SATA III, USB3
- 16GB Kingston® DDR3 1333Mhz Memory
- 1TB 7200rpm SATA II 3.0Gb/s 8MB Cache HDD
- AMD® Radeon™ HD 7970 3GB Graphic Card
- Thermaltake Level 10GT Full Tower
  w/ Side-Panel Window
- Asetek 510LC CPU Water Cooling System
  LCD monitor is not included but optional

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor
i7 i7-3960X 3.30Ghz 15MB £ 2309
i7-3930K 3.20Ghz 12MB £ 1885
i7-3820K 3.60Ghz 10MB £ 1599

From £1599

Gamer Xplorer X6-9400

Gaming Laptop with 2nd Generation
Intel® Core™ i7-2920XM Extreme Edition Processor

- Intel® HM67Chipset
  WiFi Link 802.11 A/B/G/N
  Genuine Microsoft® Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition
- 8GB DDR3-1333 SODIMM Memory
- 500GB SATA II HDD
- 15.6" Full HD 1920 x 1080 Display
- Built-in Nvidia® GeForce® GTX 570M 1.5GB PCIe Video
- 1 PCMCIA Type II Slot
  Built-in HD Webcam

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor
i7 i7-2960XM £ 1859
i7-2860QM £ 1425
i7-2760QM £ 1265
i7-2670QM £ 1149
i7-2630QM £ 1119

From £1119

Gamer Xplorer X7-7500

Gaming Laptop with 2nd Generation
Intel® Core™ i7-2820QM Processor

- Intel® HM65 Chipset
  WiFi Link 802.11 A/B/G/N
  Genuine Microsoft® Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition
- 8GB DDR3-1333 SODIMM Memory
- 500GB SATA II HDD
- 17.3" Full HD 1920x1080 Display
- Built-in Nvidia® GeForce® GT 555M 2GB PCIe Video
- 1 PCMCIA Type II Slot
  2.0 Mega Pixels Webcam

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor
i7 i7-2960XM £ 1615
i7-2860QM £ 1185
i7-2760QM £ 1025
i7-2670QM £ 915
i7-2630QM £ 895

From £895

intel inside™ CORE™ i7 Visibly Smart

Windows®. Life without Walls™, CyberPower recommends Windows 7

CYBERPOWER

WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

GO! GO! GO!

COUNTER-STRIKE: GLOBAL OFFENSIVE is the third *Counter-Strike* in 13 years. We asked Valve: why the new insurgency? ***By Rich McCormick***

Dust – de_dust to give it its regal title – is *Counter-Strike* at its most culturally pervasive.

The mustard yellow map that separates Terrorists and Counter-Terrorists with two tunnels has seen incalculable hours of playtime. But as players got better and tactics were honed, Dust's weaknesses became apparent. The Terrorists were on the wrong end of a long, fraught tunnel from their enemies. *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*'s project lead, Valve's Ido Magal, is succinct: "it was impossible as a terrorist to punch through that space."

Global Offensive's vision of Dust aims to fix that. As Ido listed the changes (see the end of this article), my countless hours of *Counter-Strike* experience kicked in. I nodded through every alteration, running the potential firefights in my head. My experience was making me excited all over again about a game I've been playing for 13 years.

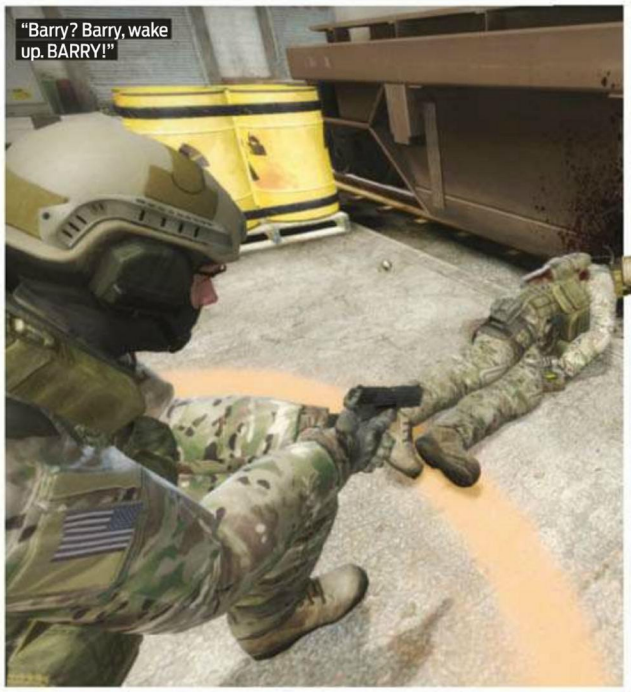
Global Offensive's blessing is its familiarity. But that's also its curse. *CS: GO* marks the third attempt to define the game. The first was by a team of modders, the second by Valve themselves. This time it's a collaboration, between Valve and Hidden Path Entertainment, makers of *Defense Grid: The Awakening*.

For much of those 13 years, the game has remained in stasis, telling the same five-minute stories of Terrorists and Counter-Terrorists planting bombs, escorting hostages, and shooting each other in the face.

Until now, that worked. It enabled the game to pervade the niche mod-culture that spawned it, and to define online gaming as we know it. It allowed a nascent professional gaming scene to coalesce around it. It has meant that for most of Steam's lifespan, the two versions of *Counter-Strike – Source* and *1.6* – have ▸

WorldMags.net

The AK and M4 are still best.


"Barry? Barry, wake up. BARRY!"

Hover boots: $1,000,000.

hogged the first and second spots on the 'most current players' list.

So why now for a new *Counter-Strike*? Valve's Chet Faliszek sees it as a logical decision. "The *Counter Strike* communities – both *CS: S* and *1.6* – are really strong. [But] if you want to get somebody excited about *CS:S* or *1.6* right now, it's pretty hard to get past the barrier of how the games look. Player numbers are starting to go down a bit. I think we're past the apex for both. We want to take what makes them special and fun and update them and grow the *Counter-Strike* community again."

Pressure, Valve

Extrapolate the demonstrably huge group of players to the next level and *CS: GO* becomes a truly exciting, industry-affecting title. Players weaned on the *1.6* and *Source* versions of Dust and Aztec and Office stand ready to replay their proudest victories and crushing defeats all over again. Chet acknowledges the burden: "There's this really strong community that has this sense of ownership of the game. You want to make sure that you work with them, that they feel the same about this new game, that we're just not thrusting it down upon them."

This collaborative work has started to loosen the inertia that has held *Counter-Strike* in place. Ido explains how his team are refitting some of gaming's most iconic environments.

"I once joked you could put 10 dollars in a bag and give it away for free, and someone's going to complain you didn't put in 20."

"Some maps were abandoned by the scene because they were too lopsided. We picked those up and decided to make bigger changes to them. Like Dust, which was extraordinarily popular back in the day, but today it's hardly played in *CS: Source*."

How did Valve make these fixes?

"It was context. We just had a lot of data that Dust wasn't being played any more, because we have that much data recording in Source."

Global Offensive marks the start of a more comprehensive data-mining exercise, enabling Valve to work out whether their changes are competitively viable. "We record every bullet fired in *CS: GO*. As *GO* ramps up and we get data then we'll be able to respond. One of our new paths might be broken, or there might be something else about Dust that needs fixing."

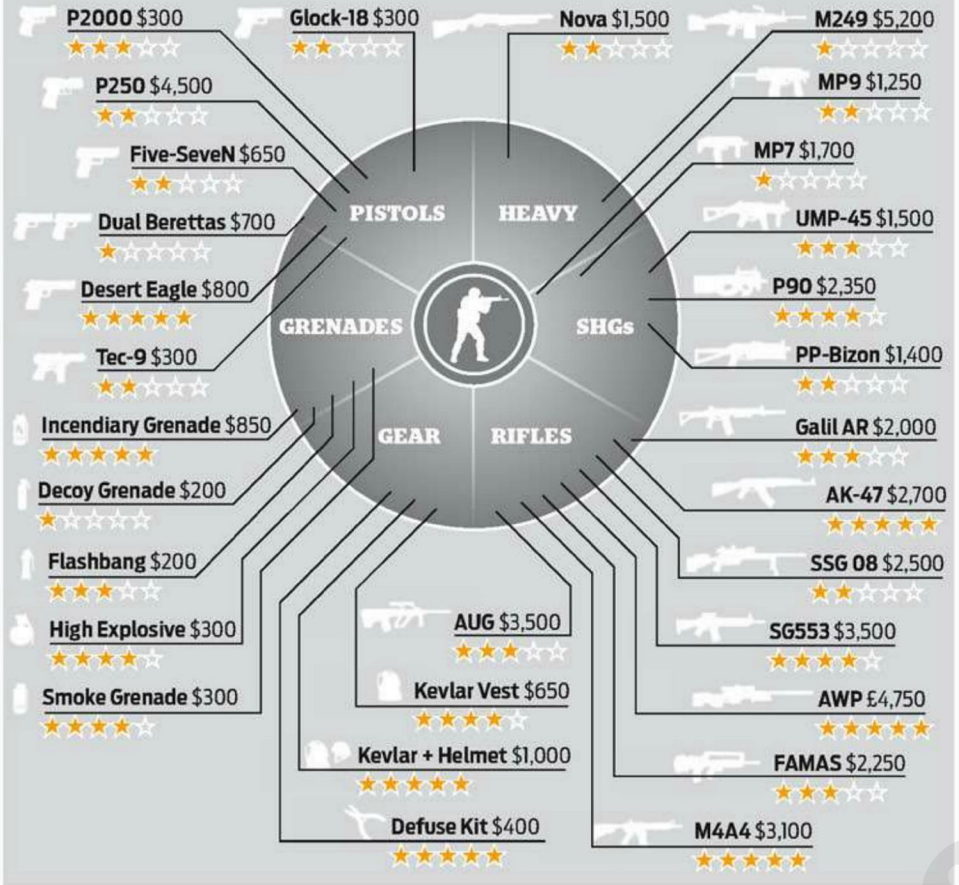
The data pulled from the earlier *Counter-Strike*s has coloured *GO* in other ways. "When we started we sorted *Counter-Strike* maps by playtime, and we picked off the top of that list. We're pretty confident that's what most of the community will want." The current lineup includes Dust 1 and 2, Train and Inferno, as well as a version of Aztec with "huge revisions." My plaintive request for an updated version of *CS 1.6*'s oddball map as_oilrig was met with diplomacy by Ido: "once we get to the ninth or tenth most-played map, we

WorldMags.net

Fear my accuracy, counter-terrorists.

You'll break your neck up there.

GUNS. LOTS OF GUNS. *CS:GO*'s arsenal exposed



can start to make some decisions about maybe picking a lesser played map that could be interesting."

In addition to updating the existing map pool, Valve are adding new arenas. Ido maintains that they won't be messing with the existing rotation. "we made the conscious decision not to start designing new highly strategic maps for the classic mode." Instead, the studio unleashed their geographical creativity on maps for *GO*'s 'demolition' mode – a hybrid of the standard bomb defusal mode and the ever-popular 'gungame' mod-modifier, where players have to earn kills with specific weapons to unlock the next one along.

"These maps are meant to be intense, quick and a bit lighter in terms of the required coordination on the team. They alleviate some of the friction from getting into *Counter-Strike* as a new player. You don't have to pick your weapon – that choice is made for you, and as soon as you spawn, you see your destination."

I've spent a lot of time on the first of these new maps, de_lake. This is a defusal map where both parties start exuberant-spitting distance from each other. They're separated by a house that serves both as buffer and congealing point for conflict, but canny players can make their way around the outside of the map, using rocks, skips and building materials as cover to hit the opposing team in their unprotected rump. The house makes battle lines quickly fluid. If the firefight has not been won after the first few salvos, players tend to circle the central house in a holding pattern, like particularly aggressive human aeroplanes.

Lake lacks the complex sight lines and constant tactical recalculations of *Counter-Strike*'s established arenas, providing instead consistently bloody – and quick – games. Lake's demolition ruleset means one skilled player has a tough time dominating the competition: the traditional gungame rules award better weapons with each kill, but as Ido explains, Valve decided to flip that idea on its head. "We started with a positive feedback loop in the weapons. That actually provided the better players a bad experience, because the game just kept getting easier for them. The weaker players just got frustrated. Then we tried reversing it, for a negative feedback loop. That was a huge success: eventually the differential in the weapons made up for the difference in the skills. Now it's more of a valley. After you've killed with the pistols, we have the Scout (sniper rifle) as a skill wall. Get a kill with that, and there's some better weapons past that. It works: a good player gets down to a pistol and a weaker player has a good chance of killing them."

Valve are committed to making *CS: GO* a tempting prospect for those weaker players. Ido codifies it for me: "accessibility, ability to find people to play with easily, visual appeal: these are the most significant issues that we're trying to fix."

Both he and Chet, when asked what they see as the biggest innovation between old and new *Counter-Strike*s, point to *GO*'s matchmaking systems.

"With *CS:GO*, the very first thing we wanted to do was have skill-based matchmaking. And that isn't just about the matchmaking itself, but what it allows us to do: we can separate. If you're playing in casual mode, you're not having Elo-based ▸

WorldMags.net

matchmaking. You're relaxed. If you're a ranked match player, you'll be playing people of equal skill."

But this accessibility comes at a price. "I once joked you could put ten dollars in a bag and give it away for free, and someone's going to complain you didn't put twenty in the bag." Chet Faliszek sighs slightly before condemning humanity. "That's just the nature of people."

Faliszek is talking about player feedback. Not even out of closed beta, *GO* has already attracted criticism, led by the very people you'd expect would love *Counter-Strike* best: professional players. *Counter-Strike 1.6* pro-gamer Tomi 'lurppis' Kovanen has dubbed it "terrible". Alex Garfield – owner of e-sports team Evil Geniuses – explained to PC Gamer how Valve should spike *GO* development completely and refocus their efforts.

Holy hand grenades

In gaming terms, *Counter-Strike* is the competitive shooting Bible. Changing it now is tantamount to blasphemy; the punishment, a public flogging provided by vocal and savvy members of the community.

In their ironsights are *GO*'s ballistic physics. *Counter-Strike*'s AK47 and M4A4 are the series' most iconic weapons, and return in *Global Offensive*. My AK handling isn't what it once was, but the gun in its current form feels flat compared to its kicking, bucking 1.6 incarnation. An impression aided by the piddly muzzle noise, more cough than bark. Pro gamer Patrik 'cArn' Sättermon explained to me how *CS* guns should respond: "the recoil should be worked out with several techniques such as tapping, single shooting and spraying. Single shots are at this point too imbalanced."

"We make the best game we can. We put everything we can into it and we go from there. There's always going to be backlash."

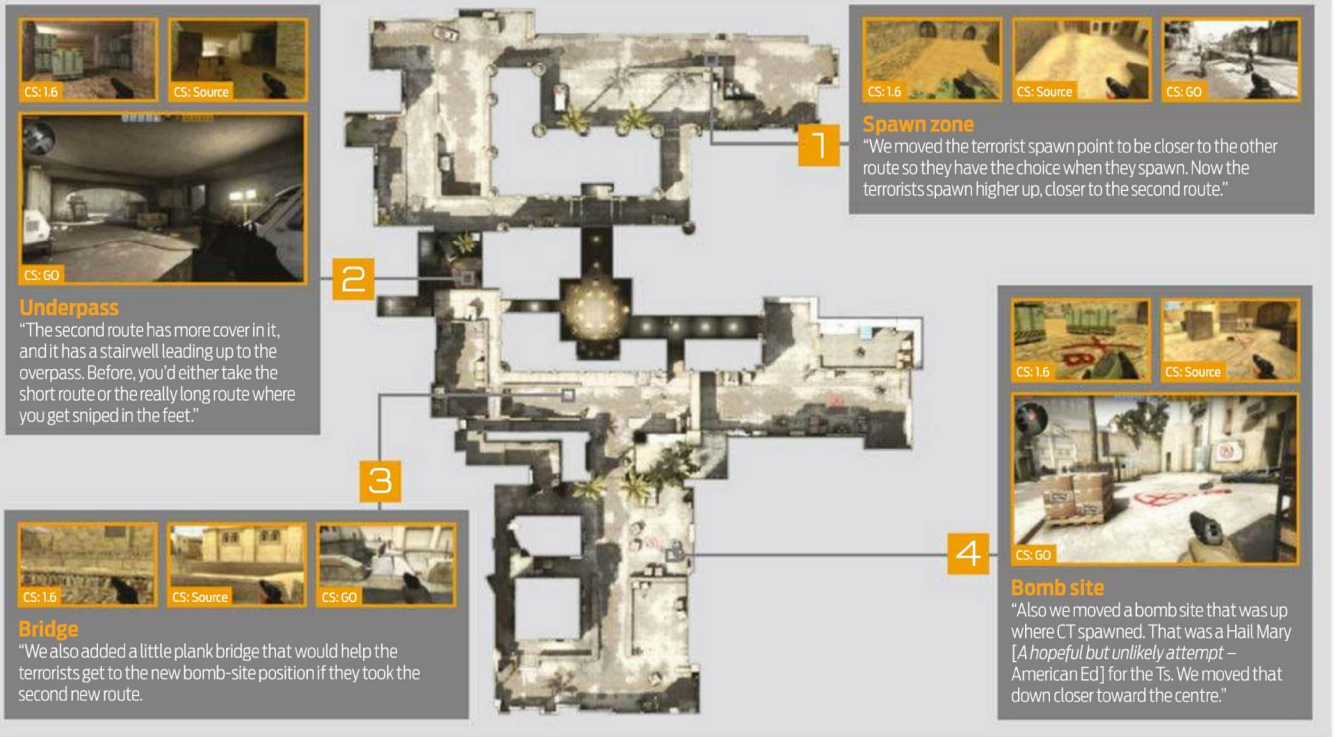
Most controversially of all, Valve have made clear their plans to release *GO* on consoles, at first for *CS*.

You can bet Chet's aware of the complaints – but they're not weighing him down. "We make the best game we can. We put everything we can into it and we go from there. There's always going to be backlash. You can't get caught up in that." He sighs again slightly as we run over the feedback Valve have received so far. "It's hard trying to communicate to the *1.6* and *CS:S* players and get them to see where it's going." But his team's solution is in place: openness.

"That's why we have this long beta. People can see what's going on, give us feedback and we'll keep working on it. It's probably unfair to call what's out a beta – it's still an alpha. It's not feature complete, and I think it's been interesting that the community have been trying to work through what that means and their expectations. Normally you get something from Valve and it's highly polished, there's this really strong starting base. Here we're saying, 'the base is still being worked on.'"

It's a marked departure for a studio known for shipping games so polished they gleam. Chet's aware of the difference, and notes what is perhaps a sea-change within the company. "We gave a talk recently about *Portal 2*'s development: a few months before it shipped, we didn't know if it was a good game or not. And so we find ourselves now developing a little differently: we have to do some stuff more visibly than we normally would, because

EVOLVING A CLASSIC Ido Magal explains how *CS: GO* has changed de_dust



WorldMags.net

internally we have this faith that it's all going to pull together at the end."

Chet sees *CS: GO* as the first time Valve have asked for feedback this early in a project, describing their approach as "getting way out in front of it." Despite the negative comments, he's adamant the response is helping. "You get them involved because if you get a million people looking at something, somebody is going to be insanely smart about some factor of it." Ido, too, acknowledges the community's experience: "We don't pretend to have played it as much or as in depth as they have, so we value their input."

Both Chet and Ido are up to date with the community's valid gripes. The day before my interview was scheduled, Evan spoke to eloquent ex-pro player turned commentator Jimmy Whisenhunt about a video in which he compares screen movement between *CS 1.6* and *CS: GO*. Whisenhunt argued the new game doesn't provide enough firing feedback. Chet drops his name: "There's some really good videos – like Recoil by Whisenhunt – where he brings up some points about feel. That's something we hadn't narrowed down on as much between *1.6*, because we were looking at the practical numbers comparison. That's the kind of thing we're not in the position to test yet – it's something we'll try internally."

Counter-Strike is one of the world's few games to benefit from a professional-standard cadre of players. Chet mentions Sal 'Volcano' Garozzo as a pro-gamer he's in constant contact with. But the community is already split between *1.6* and *CS: Source* – acquiesce to all of their demands and the game gets pulled between de_pillar and cs_ post. "You can't just say there's one answer for all the pros. There's such a variety of opinion and feedback. There's a meta thing they want: for there to continue to be a *CS* game that's played at a competitive level that they can make a living from. It's harder and harder for some sponsors to sponsor *1.6*. It doesn't show as well, it doesn't look as good, and that impacts sponsors. I've talked to a few at the New York Intel Extreme Masters tournament where it was really clear they were saying: 'hey, you're playing with a loaded gun here. While we want it to succeed because it will be better for us, if you screw it up it's gonna hurt us. So don't screw it up.' And that's fair."

I asked Chet if *GO* has a dedicated e-sports specialist working on how to slot the title into the competitive cycle. "We don't have a department that worries and works on that. Our big concern is making the best game. We don't want to prop up a game that doesn't deserve to fit into that world by just investing money or running a bunch of stuff." He believes in leaving that in the hands of people who understand their sport like no other. "They know their communities better than we know their communities. There's more value in their communities being stronger than in us saying 'no, come to us."

But *Counter-Strike* doesn't just belong to the elite core of pro players. Chet and Ido both focus on accessibility in our interview, conscious of a gigantic player base that encompasses all skill levels, game modes, and player types. Chet says "as we make *CS:GO* we have to make sure we're not making it for one part of that community – we're making it for the entire community."

For another shooter, that aim might be too lofty. *Global Offensive* is targeted at casual, lapsed, console, and hardcore players. That leaves a lot of gaps down which to disappear. But 25 million people have played it. That nation's-worth of people gives Valve enough data – it's up to them to make a game good enough to satisfy them all. ■

"I get 500 free texts on this thing."

Lake is a new map.

Don't bring a torch to a gunfight.

WorldMags.net

THE PC GAMER INTERVIEW

We trap four key **VALVE** staffers and ask them awkward questions. ***By Dan Griliopoulos and Tim Edwards***

Valve

Chet Faliszek
Erik Wolpaw
Jay Pinkerton
Doug Lombardi

Credits: *Half-Life, Portal, Team Fortress 2, Counter-Strike, Left 4 Dead*

What are you playing?
Erik: I got hooked on this turn-based strategy game called *Conquest of Elysium 3*... I'm having a blast with it.
Chet: I've actually been waiting to go and play some *SSX*.
Jay: I'm actually so wrapped up in *Skyrim* that I'm a little bit behind.

Google's slogan is 'don't be evil'. You guys don't really have a slogan, does that mean you're evil?
Chet: I'd say Google's actually evil.
Erik: Woah woah woah! That was Chet Faliszek who said that! Not the man who doesn't want to get killed by Google!

Hats in *Portal*: how did that work out?
Chet: They're not really hats, there are other things!
Erik: It was an experiment, and I don't think it's saying anything... to say it wasn't as big a success as the *TF* hats.

Valve, perhaps the most important company in PC gaming, are at an interesting point. They're changing the mod scene with the Steam Workshop, courting a 20-million strong community with *Dota 2*, and dividing fans with *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*. We talked to writer/producer Chet Faliszek, writers Erik Wolpaw and Jay Pinkerton, and VP of marketing Doug Lombardi for some insight on their decisions.

So how's life at Valve at the moment?
Erik: Good. Yeah, there's a lot of stuff going on, and that's always a good thing, right? *Dota*, *CS:GO*, *Portal* DLC coming on, other unannounced stuff.
Jay: Meet the Pyro.
Erik: One of the reasons we left that until last is because it was one of the ones where, you know when you have ideas and instead of agonising over them, the idea comes fully formed? And you're like "Oh my God, that's good!" That's kind of why we saved it for last. Because we kind of figured it would be (a) a strong closer and (b) it was sort of done, so we didn't have to screw around with it too much.

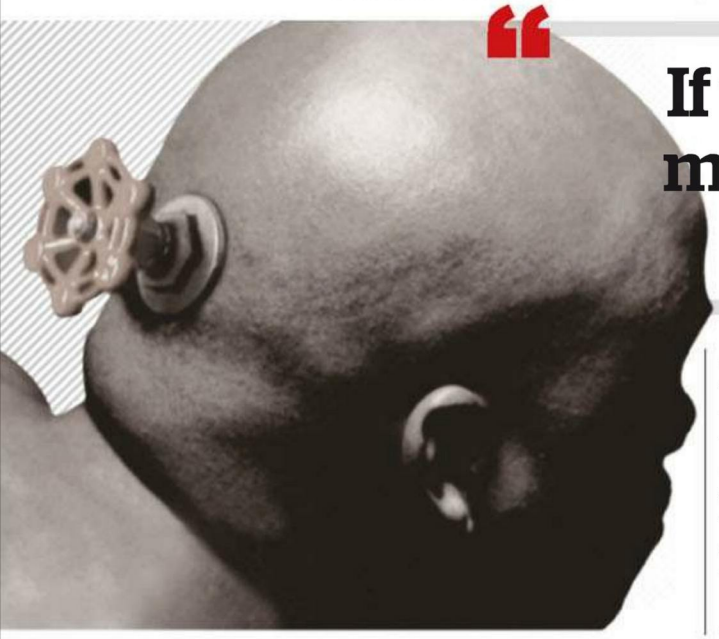
So, there are rumours of you guys making a console-like Steam Box PC – what's the story?
Chet: It's a lot of misunderstanding put together under one piece that bad conclusions were drawn from.
Doug: Yeah, of course it's a big story and obviously, it doesn't surprise me that you asked the question. We are making the Big Picture UI mode for Steam – we're always building boxes to test stuff, whether it's a *Half Life 1* software render or a big picture mode. And I think we've always been very public with wanting to play with biometric feedback, and new input devices. And yeah, we are playing around with that stuff, and we do think that we have an interesting idea there, we're pushing in different directions with that.

But all that is a long way from Valve shipping a hardware device.

EA have launched Origin – would you like to see other people launching competing things in the market, to incentivise you guys?
Erik: Well, I think any service is fine. I don't know if anybody's come up with a secret sauce that's absolutely the perfect thing of all things.

Steam is pretty good.
Erik: It is, but someone else can come and push on us more so we do better things. There's things we could seem to be doing better with groups, there's things we could seem to be doing better with community stuff so that people have a way to interact that's just not in the game, and that's stuff we're working on, and we're trying to do it.

And that's what the Workshop is so cool about.



> **If you want to make games... just do it**

I think that's one of the most interesting things you guys have done over the past year. Presumably *Portal* is a Steam Workshop game that Puzzle Creator will link into?
Erik: Correct.
Chet: You'll see the Steam Workshop coming from there, then to *Left 4 Dead* and then we're going to keep using it. Because it's a great way... it's not just for the modders, it's for the players. It's a super easy way to consume the creations of other people that are just really hard to do otherwise.

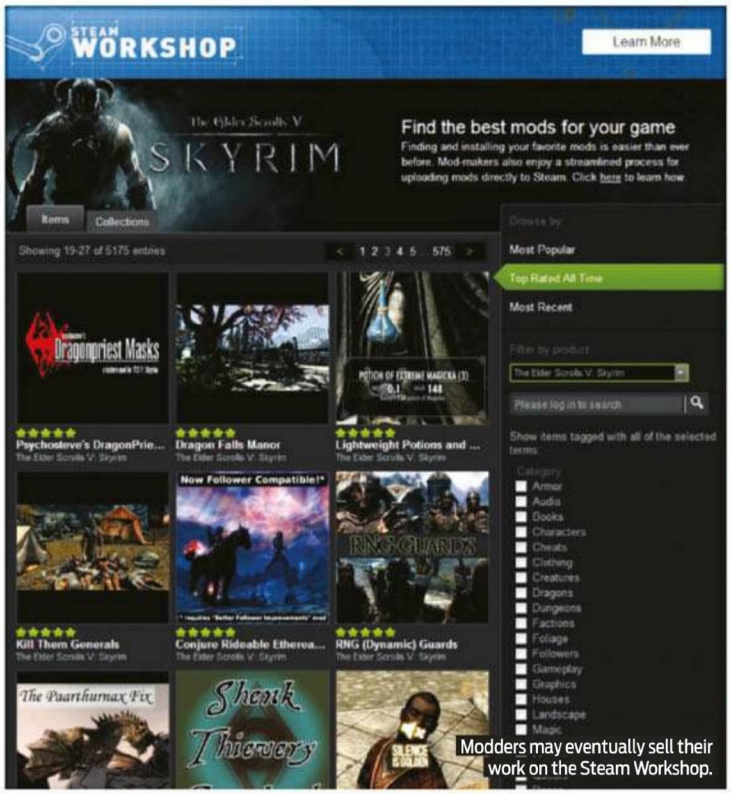
So is it a creator funding exercise as well, so you can make money from making stuff?
Jay: It depends, *Skyrim*'s not... they're not charging anything for it.
Erik: But the infrastructure's there that they could, yeah.

So would you like to do that for *Portal*?
Jay: We'll see. It's kind of up to the community with that.

I think it would have been a very different story for the *Left 4 Dead* mod situation, had the Steam Workshop existed when *Left 4 Dead* came out.
Jay: And the acknowledgement of that is what led to some of the development of the Steam Workshop.

One of things you're always doing is hiring from the community. What are you looking for from your applicants?
Erik: Make something. Do something that we can't ignore.
Chet: Get us excited.
Erik: Yeah, especially when we hire from the community, obviously. I don't know if you're familiar with [*Minerva* creator] Adam Foster? He just did so much great stuff that at some point we're like: "we are dumb not to hire this guy."
Chet: But even then, we are still going to interview, because we want to make sure that they're not a savant that can't talk about their work. Because at Valve you have to talk

WorldMags.net



Modders may eventually sell their work on the Steam Workshop.

Valve are trying to make *Dota 2* more user friendly.

They add a new champion class to the game almost every week.

about your work, that's how we make our decisions. We don't have somebody saying, "Oh, the design documents says we're going to make this." They're going to say, "Hey, what were you thinking about here? What were you trying to do?" And you've got to talk about it.

Is there anything you'd say to someone on a game development course?

Erik: If you can learn by doing, do it. At least at Valve, a degree will be meaningless. The product that you've created, making something, is much more important.

Chet: If you want to make games, there's no gatekeeper, there's nobody else you have to ask permission of – just do it.

That's exactly what John Romero said.

Chet: Yeah, that's exactly how he did it. If people ask or write in, "How do I get into the games industry?" the reality is, the minute you're asking that question, you're probably not ready yet to make a game.

Do you think the death of bricks-and-mortar retail has come too early? That it could damage the industry, not having these guys still there?

Doug: You know, the erosion of it – and I would describe it as an erosion – was something that I think we all got a little numb to, and the Game one was a bit startling to me.

Is it too soon? I don't know. I can remember after we launched *Half-Life 2* and we fixed the situation with Steam and whatnot, Game said, "How long do you think it's going to take us before Steam is really a big deal?" And I sort of laughed at them and said, "Oh jeez, it's going to be at least five to ten years."

And here we are less than ten years from then, and it's a pretty big deal. It's a big percentage of a lot of people's sales over here, and it's becoming a bigger deal over there.

I think the big event that's going to happen is: when are we going to see the next generation of consoles, and how are they going to play into some of the new dynamics such as free-to-play?

So Steam is pretty much PC gaming for a lot of people.

Doug: That's nice of you to say! [Laughs]

OK. So I'm just wondering if you start to feel a responsibility for pushing the PC, promoting other people's games.

Doug: Are you asking the question 'do we see ourselves as the platform holder?'

Yeah, I think that's part of it.

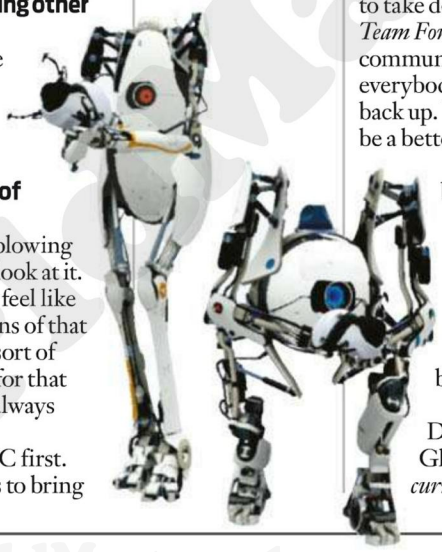
Doug: I think that's overblowing the statement of how we look at it. I think that we definitely feel like we're one of the champions of that platform, and that we're sort of helping to carry the flag for that platform and I think we always have been.

We've always put the PC first. We've held Editor's Days to bring people in and educate them on the fact – there was a big thing in 2006-2005 – somewhere in that timeframe... there was a lot of PR about consoles killing PC games and all this kind of stuff.

We brought people in and said "Look, let's start with 'who's telling you this story?' It's [market researcher group] NPD, and what do they have? They have access to retail data. So they're not counting *World of Warcraft* subscription money, they're not counting Steam and all this stuff."

But I think we've always felt a responsibility to our audience – we're PC gamers first and we love PC games so we've always wanted to do that. I mean we've built Steam because nobody else was doing it and we built it as solid as we'd need to make PC gaming better.

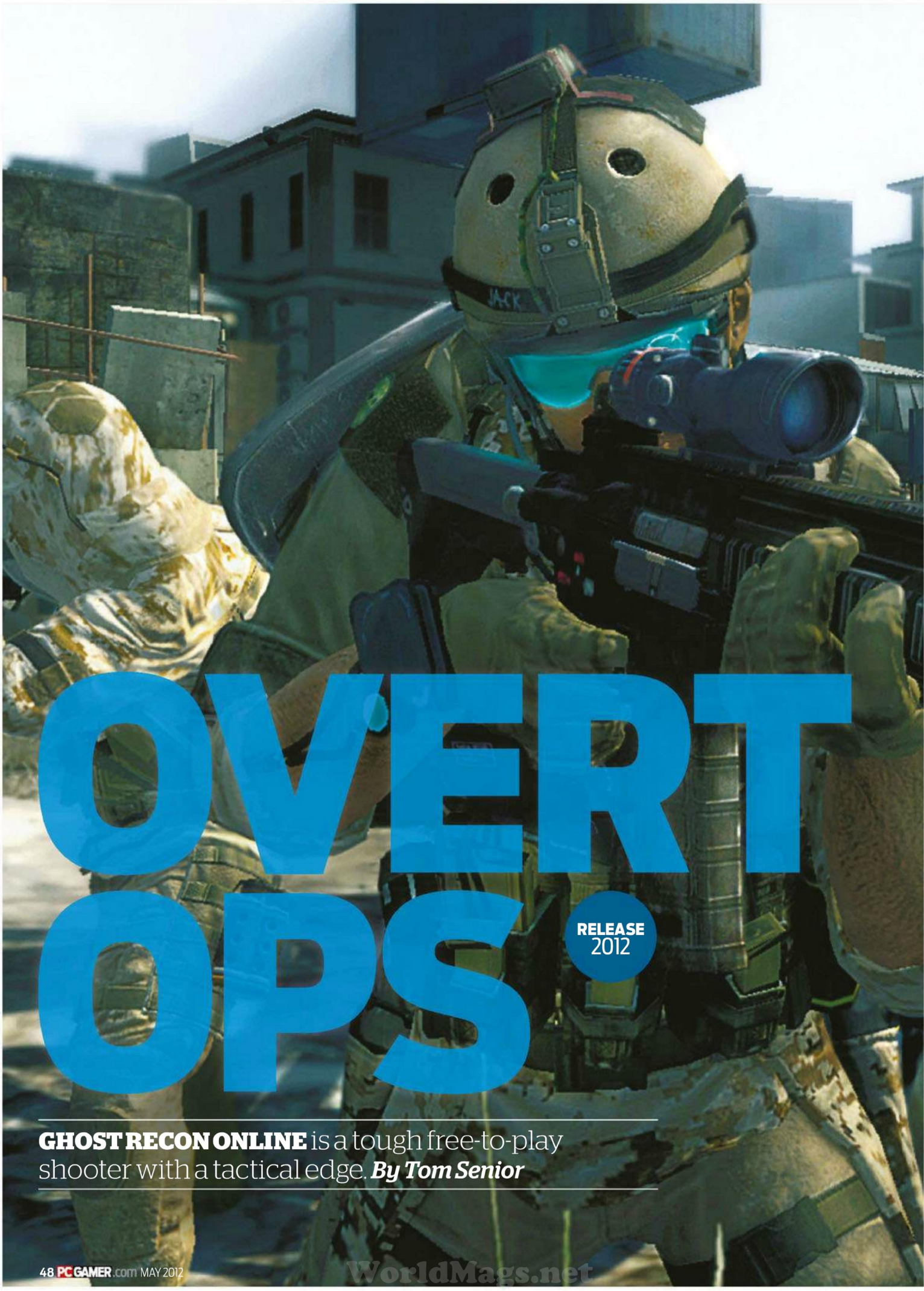
The fact [is] that we were holding back updates because we didn't want to take down the whole *Half-Life 1*, *Team Fortress* and *Counter-Strike 1* communities for 48 hours before everybody found the patch and came back up. We were like: "there's got to be a better solution for this."



And you've heard me say it before: we went to talk to Yahoo and Microsoft and everybody else who should have been doing something in that space, and after a while Gabe was like "Well, eff it, we've got to build it ourselves then."

Dota 2 *and* Counter-Strike: Global Offensive *are both currently in closed beta.* ■

WorldMags.net



OVERT OPS

RELEASE 2012

GHOST RECON ONLINE is a tough free-to-play shooter with a tactical edge. ***By Tom Senior***

WorldMags.net

"I finally killed a man, catching him unawares as he lay prone. Then his friend shot me in the head"

"Aaaah!" said I. Bullets were pinging around me. Again, "Aaaah." A grenade has just landed behind my cover. "Ahhh!" I charge out of cover. "Ahhh!" I am dead. At least I'd stopped screaming.

I died several more times in the following minutes. I was shot in the head by an unseen sniper at the end of the street. I was obliterated by a shotgun blast as I jumped through a doorway. I was capped in the spine by a decloaking recon soldier. Death by death, my questions grew. Should a free-to-play shooter be this brutal? Should it be this bloody *hard*?

Ghost Recon Online is a third-person multiplayer shooter set in the near future. It has almost nothing in common with the tactical shooter series of the same name, beyond the futuristic gadgets its soldiers wield. As a member of a Special Forces squad, you have to capture control points in urban warzones for unexplained reasons. Doing so will net you experience which can then be used to level up your soldier, unlocking new gun attachments, armour pieces and grenades. There's little reconnaissance, and there are no ghosts at all, but there is cover. Lots and lots of sweet, life-preserving cover. Sticking to it religiously is the key to surviving a match .

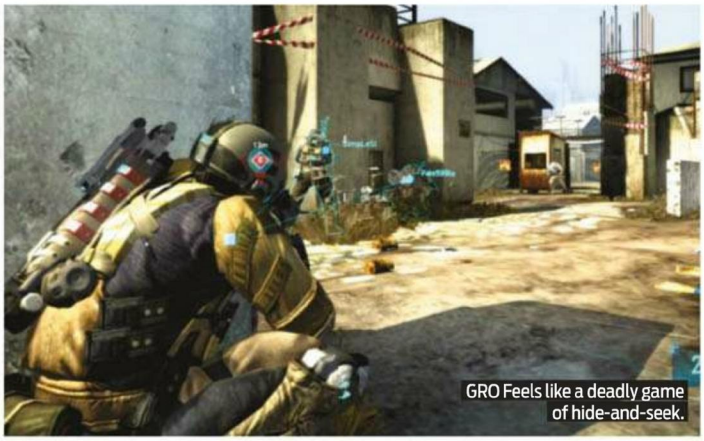
I was doing it all wrong, I soon realised. This isn't *Call of Duty*. You can't just bomb around the map like a lone madman, gunning down enemies as they pop into view. Taking those control points requires a bit of thought. I changed my style. I started dashing from cover to cover in a low crouch, gluing myself to low walls at every opportunity. This time I survived for more than a few minutes. I finally killed a man, catching him unawares as he lay prone. Then his friend popped out of cover behind him and shot me in the head. I was still doing it wrong.

I needed back-up. Good teamwork is essential to victory in *GRO*. I should have known: the game draws ostentatious blue lines from your soldier to any nearby, off-screen friends. The more soldiers you have guarding your back, the more likely it is you'll survive each dash to cover.

Just a couple of bullets can kill. Potshots can be used to remind cowering enemies that you're waiting for them to pop their heads above the parapet. This can be used to subdue snipers, giving the rest of your team the breathing space to flank the enemy team or move in on capture points.

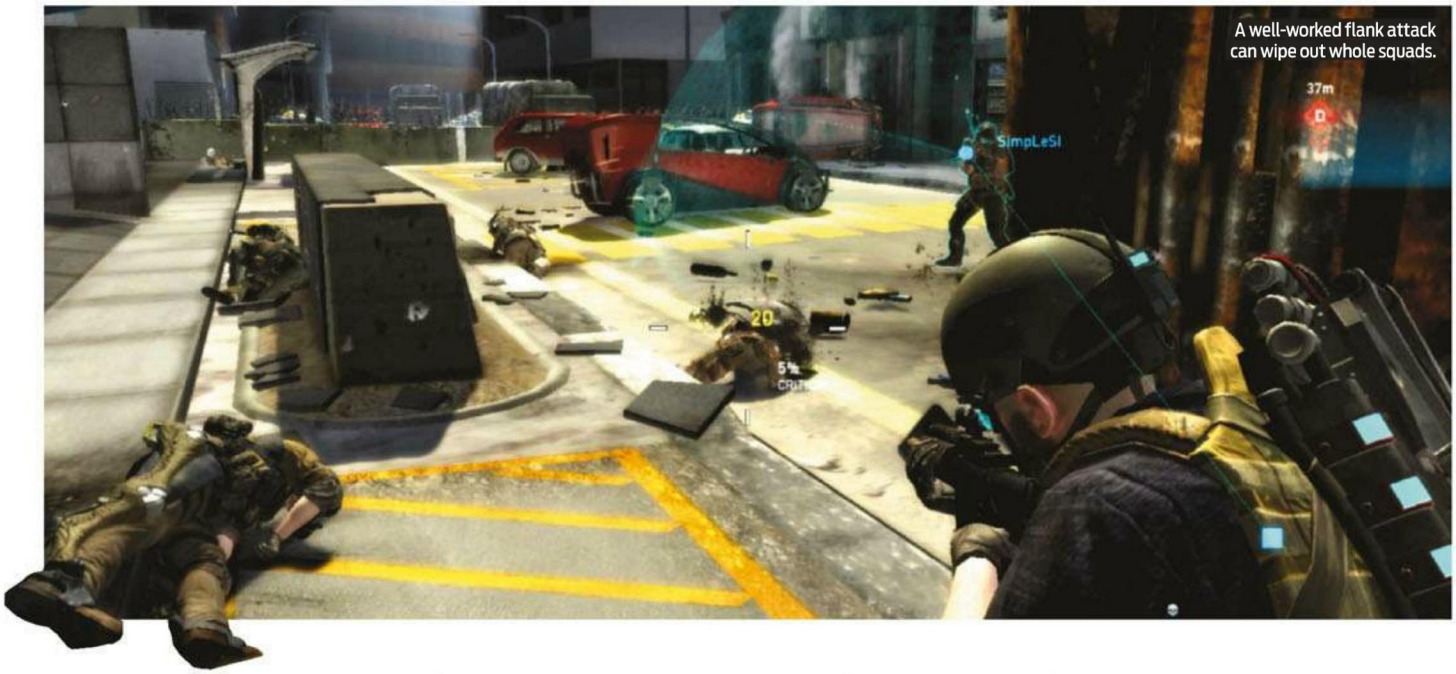
Attacking as part of a well organised squad can be rewarding. It's satisfying to watch a teammate make a well-executed dash to forward cover while your companions lay down covering fire. It's even better when you're the soldier making a break for it. I'd commonly vault over my low wall into clear ground and see several enemy heads pop out of cover, only to be efficiently plugged by my supporting sniper. ▸

WorldMags.net



GRO Feels like a deadly game of hide-and-seek.

If there's a sniper up there, we're doomed.



A well-worked flank attack can wipe out whole squads.

When experienced squads meet, there's deadlock. Both sides camp across from each other, trying to pick off unsupported individuals. Luckily these face-offs can be resolved quickly with mad science. With the tap of the F key I can deploy my secret weapon: a robot arm that shoots microwaves. There's a long cooldown on the microwave blast, so it has to be used with care, but it can solve a stalemate in seconds. Powering up grants me thermal vision, enabling me to see nearby targets. I can point the microwave field in the direction of the enemy to boil the blood in their veins, a phenomenon that's mercifully only represented by some visual distortion on their end. I'll be vulnerable while the device is deployed, but teammates can use the distraction to mop up foes in seconds.

The type of special ability you get depends on the class you choose. There are three. Assault soldiers get assault rifles, the microwave arm, or a shield that you can use to charge and knock down enemies. Recon agents get sniper rifles and can scan areas for enemies, highlighting them on everyone's minimap. They can also cloak in short bursts to get the drop on enemies. Specialists can replenish the ammo reserves of nearby friendly soldiers and deploy extremely useful temporary shield domes that often form the centre of a concerted push.

These abilities can be levelled up to increase the duration of their effects. You'll level your Assault, Recon and Specialist profiles separately. Experience earned capping points and killing baddies will push up your overall level in each class, unlocking new guns, helmets and armour pieces for purchase in the shop. These can be bought with Requisition Points earned in-game, or with real money.

You'll also get a random loot drop at the end of each game. The quality of the loot depends on how well you performed and can be anything from a temporary boost that can buff your armour to a new scope for your gun. *GRO*'s experience system places a greater emphasis on teamwork than kill counts. Capping points and supporting buddies will earn much more experience and money than frags.

Enemies go down quickly enough to keep combat feeling punchy and dangerous but a constant numerical bombardment clutters an already busy

MOVE UP HOW TO TAKE TERRITORY WITHOUT TAKING CASUALTIES

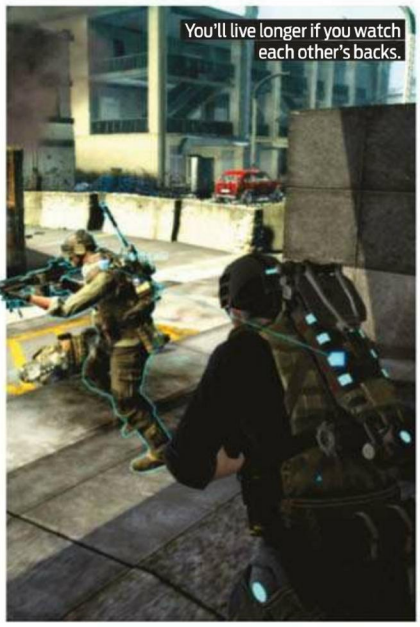
1 COVERING FIRE
This pair can take potshots to keep foes' heads low. The Specialist on the right will be needed later.

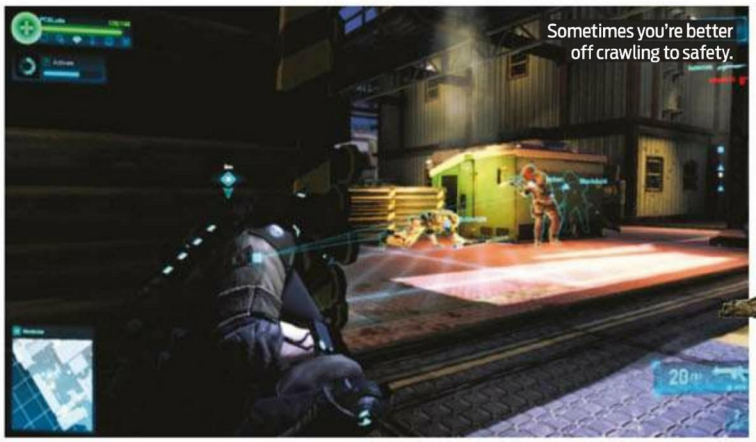
2 BACK TO THE WALL
Whack yourself up against this wall and support the Specialist, then storm the enemy in the safety of his bubble shield

3 GHOSTBUSTER
This lone wolf can cloak and harry enemy lines up close, or go prone and snipe from afar.

WorldMags.net

Those blue lines give stats boosts to nearby soldiers.


You'll live longer if you watch each other's backs.


Sometimes you're better off crawling to safety.

Expect lots of in-game advertising via billboards.

interface. *Ghost Recon Online*'s fondness for floating numbers and a mad HUD is one of the few elements borrowed from the old *Ghost Recon* games. The spindly lines that show you your squad's location are just about useful enough to be worthwhile, but layer that on top of a storm of floating damage values, cover stats and the occasional mad boiling microwave field effect and things start to get messy, and more than a little overwhelming when you first jump in.

Laying bare the underlying maths of combat doesn't help to sell the near-future military war setting either, but GRO doesn't seem especially interested in immersing players in a realistic battlefield. There's little backstory or reason attached to objectives, and the industrial environments and urban warzones feel familiar and utilitarian. They are thoughtfully designed however, and tremendous fun to traverse.

The flee-to-pray model

Ubisoft have nailed the cover system. From a crouched run, you can press Space to skid gracefully into hiding. Pressing the prone button will cause your soldier to hunker down even further, giving him more protection against elevated snipers. From this position your soldier will move around in a desperate scramble. Seeing my soldier's fear only made the bullets zinging overhead even scarier. A nice touch.

Getting in and out of these protected positions feels fluid and reliable. A press of the E key sends you vaulting over the top, a brave move that should only be used when you're sure you're covered. Pressing the prone button while running causes your soldier to hurl himself onto his belly with the fervour of a war movie extra eagerly milking his three seconds in the limelight. The whole system is responsive and well animated. It's miles better than *Brink*'s free running, and the best cover system since *Rainbow Six: Vegas*.

Other areas need improvement, most notably the guns. In the beta sessions I played, firing on fully automatic sent the barrel leaping skywards, spraying hot lead all over the place. The default firing mode was completely useless, but switching to semi-automatic yielded better results. Emptying half a clip at an enemy a few metres away and losing the fight because of insane bullet spread is one of the most infuriating experiences you can have in a competitive shooter.

This is part of *Ghost Recon Online*'s biggest problem. As a new player coming into the beta completely fresh, my overriding emotion for the first hour was one of burning frustration. Even once I'd figured out how it all worked, inexperienced teammates could still disrupt things. When camped near a well-defended control point, I watched a low-level ally skip into the open and charge their lines. 'I was like you once, kid,' I thought, as I watched him die. 'If only you knew what I know now, half an hour later.'

That half hour is the problem. Players booting up a free-to-play game aren't going to take the time to learn its systems as they might with a game they've just bought. *Ghost Recon Online* can be brutal, and without tutorials or more instruction for new players, I can see thousands of shooter fans bouncing straight off it.

It's going to be an incredible year for free-to-play shooters. *Tribes: Ascend* is fast, accessible and beautiful, *Planetside 2*'s huge scraps offer an impressive spectacle, and *Firefall* will have a gorgeous world and huge jetpacks. A tough, tactical shooter like this is going to have to work hard to hold out against these colourful competitors. *Ghost Recon Online* isn't big, or especially showy, but there's a tense, clever shooter hiding under that mad interface that'll reward you for persevering past those opening matches. In the end, I'm glad I did. ■

WorldMags.net

URBAN LEGEND

RELEASE 2013

SIMCITY is back, and fighting to regain its post as mayor of the city-building genre. ***By Tyler Wilde***

WorldMags.net

The word in the forums is that Maxis is dead. There will never be another 'true' *SimCity* game. EA will 'just barf out casual fluff.' The sceptics are wrong. Hidden behind frosted glass and keycard readers, the legendary sim studio is vibrantly alive. While fans lamented its death and pined for a new game, Maxis have been drafting design documents, sticking concept art to walls, and painfully biting their tongues.

"My wife's pretty good at keeping secrets," jokes creative director Ocean Quigley. The secret is out now. For over two years Maxis have been quietly developing an ambitious new simulation engine called GlassBox, and with it, *SimCity*. And don't worry, the lack of a '5' after the name doesn't mean that this is another *Societies* spin-off.

"We wanted to modernise it, but at its core, it's what players of *SimCity* are expecting to play," says lead designer Stone Librande. He's modest. The GlassBox engine is a complete overhaul of the sim's inner workings, much more than just a 'modernising.' The winning formula, however, has been preserved.

You are the godlike mayor of a blank-slate city. You can zone areas for residential, commercial and industrial purposes, plop down civic buildings, build power plants and roads. The goal is to grow your city while keeping your residents happy. All that original *SimCity* mojo is there, but something very new is spinning all the gears.

Inside the box

Previous *SimCity* games used high-level stats to tell us about the little things. Pollution too high? Some numbers shifted and a red bar told us that our Sims were pissed off about the smog. GlassBox does the opposite. It simulates the little things – thousands of Sims, houses and businesses – and lets the issues emerge organically. Pollution too high? The water turns brown, Sims get sick, hospitals fill up, and factories lose employees.

Zoom down to street level in *SimCity 4*, and you'll see traffic fading in and out of existence. It's informed by the probability that cars will be there. In the GlassBox engine, those cars are Sims going to work or the park. If there's a traffic jam, it's not because the simulation ran some numbers and said, "Oh hey, you seem to have a traffic problem over here." It's because there were too many cars on a narrow road.

These Sims start each day at the top of a flowchart, asking a series of simple questions such as: "Am I sick? Do I have shopping money? Do I need to find a job? If there aren't any jobs, is there a park to sit in?" As individuals they're mundane, but plop thousands into the same space, combined with thousands of other simulated objects, and fascinating living patterns emerge.

That traffic jam might stall a coal truck en route to a power plant. The plant's fuel supply depletes, its generator stops spinning, and the city goes dark. You decide that coal plants are too much hassle, so you purchase power from a neighbouring city and lay off the workers at the inoperative plant. The jobless Sims are angry, and now you have protesters on your hands. It'll be up to you to solve these problems, and what's really impressive is watching them all emerge in real-time.

Unlike the sprite-based *SimCity 4*, *SimCity* has 3D models, dynamic lighting, and building physics (which should make disasters fun to watch).

"A huge inspiration for us has been the aesthetic of tilt-shift," Quigley says, referring to the photographic technique often used to make real cities look like scale models. "It's become really popular in the last few years, and we realised it really feels consistent with the aesthetic of *SimCity*. It's like ▸

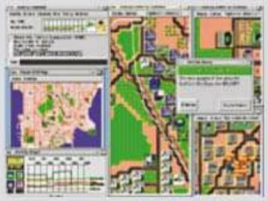
WorldMags.net

The excellently named Ocean Quigley.

Coal mining is now an economic possibility.

Cities no longer all look like Manhattan.

EVOLUTION *SimCity* through the ages



SimCity *(1989)*
The original, based on Will Wright's mapmaking tool for *Raid on Bungeling Bay*. Despite the 2D graphics, it's still recognisably *SimCity*, requiring zoning, power-grid placement and transport management.

SimCity 2000 *(1993)*
The sequel's shift to an isometric view brought elevated terrain and underground management of subways and water pipes. It was also the game that gave us silly loading messages like 'reticulating splines.'

SimCity 4 *(2003)*
SimCity 4's major addition was a regional view, enabling multiple cities to be created across an overhead map. Connecting these to transport routes let your finances and population flow between metropolises.

SimCity Societies *(2007)*
The first PC *SimCity* not developed by Maxis, *Societies* focused on social engineering over city planning. Instead of taking direct action, the player improved societal values to change the city. Was crap.

a little miniature world you can reach in and manipulate."

The engine isn't fully polished, but in its current state, the buildings are simple and charming. Quigley noticed how model-builders created convincing miniature towns by focusing on recognisable details and leaving out anything peripheral. That design tactic is especially necessary given *SimCity*'s scale.

"We wanted to make sure there was enough detail in those buildings so that when you get down to them and look in, you get this illusion of an interior," he says. "You get the details of the bricks, the sculpted facade – stuff that's worth looking at. But we've also had to do this at scale. It's not enough to have a really high-polygon model of the power plant and call it a day."

The technical chicanery extends beyond just bricks and mortar. Of your city's population, Quigley says "we've come up with this rendering technique, where they look fully 3D. They're lit, they're animated, they're full-on models – but it's a technique where we can render them in the thousands." As he speaks, a fire truck speeds down the street, illuminating each pedestrian with its flashing lights as it screams by.

"There are no visuals in the game that aren't bound to meaning," Quigley tells me. "Whenever you see a smoke puff, or a gear turn, or doors open or close, it's because the simulator is making that happen."

This is part of a strict design philosophy: put the data in the world. If an arsonist lights a fire, you can watch him do it, and you can watch the fire truck navigate traffic to get to the scene. A puff of smoke from a power plant is really pollution entering the atmosphere, and its pile of coal really represents the state of its supply.

Even abstracted data is fun to look at. One demonstration layers a 3D bar graph over every building in the city – the higher the bar, the more Sims are in that building. I watch the graph undulate as the city lives. In another overlay, I watch water travel from pumps to houses.

Built on rock and coal

Although Stone Librande stresses that the essentials won't be mucked about with, *SimCity* is full of new ideas. Some are minor, such as the ability to build curvy roads (no longer will every city look like Manhattan), and the option to upgrade buildings.

A more significant addition is the option to choose 'city specialisations,' which direct cities toward unique styles and economic strategies. The two specialisations demonstrated were gambling and coal mining towns,

WorldMags.net

Enormous blurry giants will be one of the new disasters.

Authentic traffic flow = authentic traffic problems.

Ooh, monorail!

Next-gen cardboard-look graphics shaders. Or a model, possibly.

which raises a bigger question: "You can mine coal?"

Yes, *SimCity* will feature harvestable resources, and the implications are deep. Pointing to poster-sized design documents covered with flowcharts and concept sketches, Librande gives me a lesson in vertical integration.

"Every city that you start up will have some type of resource built into it, maybe that's oil, ore, trees, fish – who knows? You can harvest those resources out." Librande points to the top of a daunting chart. "In this case lumber's going out, and we could sell it right away for maybe $90 on the global market, or maybe we could trade it with our neighbour.

"I can also take those goods – those raw resources – and start running them through a supply chain. Every step of the supply chain increases the value of the commodity I'm manufacturing. I could sell these engines and get $2,000 on the global market, but if I take those engines and combine them with tires, some metal, and some oil, I can make cars, ship them out to the dock, the boat picks them up and I get $15,000 per car. So I can add value along the way, and it's kind of tempting for a player who wants to make a lot of money, but every step along the way I'm increasing the complexity, and one thing that's guaranteed about complex systems is when they fail, they fail catastrophically. With so many points of failure, one traffic jam or one fire just blows the rest of the chain... my whole city could grind to a halt."

The phrases 'trade with our neighbour' and 'global market' need more explaining. Like previous games, *SimCity* will feature a region view in which multiple cities can be founded, but this time the cities may not all be yours. You can invite friends to found their own towns in your region.

Each of these will have its own specialisation, and its own advantages and drawbacks. Maybe you have a coal-mining neighbour, and you're able to purchase cheap, plentiful energy from them. That's great, until their pollution starts seeping into your town and makes your Sims sick.

That good/bad dichotomy is fundamental to *SimCity*. Casinos attract crime, industry causes pollution, and, since 'ignorance is bliss', education breeds unrest. Even parks can cause problems. They're lovely places to relax, but if unemployment rises, they'll fill with homeless people.

The 'SimCity World' feature makes these socio-economic issues global. Your region is abstractly connected to every region and every city of every player in the world. Industrious mayors can buy and sell goods on a global market, and playing the supply and demand game might land you at the top of the leaderboards as an industry mogul. But at what cost? Maxis hinted that dirty coal plants may not just affect regional air quality, but also global pollution levels. Will we pollute our world to death, or will our choking Sims convince us to forsake lucrative mining operations?

At this stage, hundreds of questions remain unanswered. What other city specialisations can we choose? How exactly will the multiplayer interface work? Will there be UFOs? But if the game retains the ambition of the build I saw, the number of potential scenarios will be enormous. ■

THE LOL

GRAHAM SMITH

Pretends that he isn't competitive up until the point when he wins, then dances obscenely in victory.
Specialist event: *Nidhogg*

TIM EDWARDS

Tim is PC Gamer's editor, and so is already the magazine's first place finish in everything.
Specialist event: MMOarathon

RICH MCCORMICK

Once had a competition over who knew the best Thomas the Tank Engine fact. It was declared a tie.
Specialist event: *StarCraft II*

WorldMags.net

LOL
OL

YMPICS

The PC's greatest sportsman revealed

TOM FRANCIS

Prefers watching competitive games to taking part in them, but is quietly quite good at everything.

Specialist event: Pizza parties

We at PC Gamer take our games extremely seriously. Each time we sit down to play a *StarCraft II* match, or grip the throttle in front of a new flight simulator, or spend hours mastering some new indie game, we're not doing it for fun. It's not even about informing or entertaining you, our readers. It's training. It's practice for that time, every four years, when PC Gamer's greatest sportsmen gather and compete to be the world's best. That time is now.

We've pitted Tim, Tom, Chris, Rich and Graham against each other across eight separate gaming events, each designed to test their sporting skill. Placing first in any event nets the Lolympian three points, while second place gets two points and third gets one. Only one will hold aloft the trophy of victory.

CHRIS THURSTEN

Knows how to fence, making him the only entrant qualified to play an actual Olympic sport.

Specialist event: PC speed-build

WorldMags.net

EVENT 1

BUILD A PC

The Task
Build a PC from scratch against the clock

The Rules
The case must be closed, and the clock stops when the entrant saves a text file to the PC's desktop

RICH Being PC Gamer's most competitive writer makes me the most qualified to win competitions, no matter what the challenge. I volunteer to go first in building a PC, to intimidate the others with my obviously advanced skill at everything. It starts badly when I get confused over the SATA cables, proceeds terribly when I forget to plug in one of the power cables to the motherboard, and ends with a RAM error that takes ages to solve. Beat this, you guys!

Seriously. Beat it. It's a really bad time.

TIME 38m40s

TOM Thirty eight minutes – lol! I take one look at the pile of bits, screw everything in, and switch on. Nothing. The front panel stuff I skipped includes the power switch itself – I probably need that. Not gonna faff around figuring out which microscopic pins the rest of that stuff is, it's just lights. It powers up! It's been about three minutes! First place, surely? There isn't actually anything on screen – but first place, surely…

Nothing. Fifty-one minutes later: it's the front panel stuff I skipped. It needs those lights.

TIME 54m30s

TIM I've practised for this event by building a new PC from scratch for my home. I troubleshot problems, I screwed in tiny screws, I received static shocks. I'm ready for this.

I am *not* ready for this.

There are problems with the RAM, which I fix. Then there are problems with the graphics card, which I fix. Then there are problems with the fan on the PSU, making a terrifying creaking noise when one of the power cables is plugged in. After over an hour of trying, I decide the PC is just broken. [*We checked. The PC is fine* – Technical Ed]

TIME DNF

CHRIS Okay. Easy. I have small, dexterous hands. I can do this. I seat the motherboard, then the RAM, then the graphics card, and hook up the HDD. Test boot time. I hit a black screen. To reduce the criteria for failure, I plug the monitor into the motherboard's onboard graphics. No dice. I reseat the RAM. Success! I get to the desktop, but I'm still using on-board graphics. I could create my text file now and stop the clock at just over 25 minutes, but I decide against it. This is a games PC, right? I switch the PC off again, plug in the graphics card, and promptly drop a metal screw somewhere in the case. Hopefully, the PC won't notice.

BEEP! CHASSIS INTRUSION!

I spend the next five minutes looking for the screw. I find it, remove it, boot the PC, and save my file. Phew.

TIME 33m35s

GRAHAM I've built a lot of PCs in my life, and I've seen the insides of this one before. I've spent a weekend going over my routine in my head. Flip the case, put the right-hand side panel on. Fit the RAM in the motherboard. Jam in the hard drive, stuff in the mobo without screws, plug in the graphics card. Connect the power cables to the motherboard, hard drive, graphics card. Wire the 'on' switch. Plug in monitor, keyboard, mouse, switch on. Done! No, wait, I forgot the hard drive. Plug hard drive in to motherboard, boot, it works. Close case. Done! Really done. I am the fastest!

TIME 10m28s

WINNER
GRAHAM

WorldMags.net

EVENT 2

STARCRAFT II

The Task
Win a five-player *StarCraft II* free-for-all

The Rules
No peeking at each other's screens. Also, everyone should probably gang up on Rich

RICH Right, we're in business. I've spent hundreds of hours playing *StarCraft II* online, and possess two different accounts so I can play different races online and not ruin my ranking. I'm a platinum Terran and a gold Zerg, and today I'm playing Terran. Let's go.

TIM I love *StarCraft II*. I don't play it nearly enough to be good, but I am devious. I message all the other players except Rich: "Guys. We can't let Rich win." They all reply back immediately. "No. No we can't."

RICH I've gone reactor Hellion expo, banging down a CC in my nat after cranking out four Hellions. Chris's Zealots and Tim's Zerglings both die fast to sustained Hellion fire. I get my second base up without much trouble, and move into my much-practised mid-game. I'm going mech.

CHRIS I've played enough *StarCraft II* against Rich and Tim to know that they're the biggest threats. I'm the only Protoss in the game. Tim's trying to rally the troops to wipe out Rich, and I plan on only making a minor commitment.

TOM I watch a lot of professional *StarCraft 2*, but I've only played online once and decided never to do so again. I'm Zerg. Every four or five drones, I remember a snippet of commentary like '14 pool', realise I'm on 17 supply, and hastily start a Spawning Pool. I'm managing my base so badly that I soon have around 3,000 minerals I can't spend.

GRAHAM I'm Terran and haven't played since the beta. I know enough to tell my harvesting guys to harvest crystals from the crystal fields. Other than that, I poke my way through the menus and build the things with cool names.

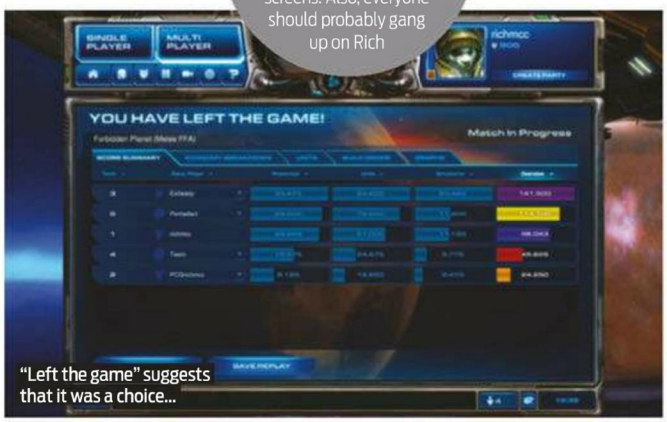
CHRIS Instead of going for my natural expansion, I establish a base at the gold resource line near Tom and Graham. They won't check there, and Tim and Rich will be busy with each other. I get it up to full strength, establishing an early resource advantage. I throw down two Stargates: time for Void Rays.

TOM I'm doing every part of it inefficiently, but I'm going high-econ fast-expand. I put up a few spine crawlers to defend my natural expansion. Then I realise Graham has snuck some Reapers into my mineral line and shot most of my drones.

GRAHAM I don't know *StarCraft II* very well, but I know strategy games. I've fumbled my way towards annoying Tom and feel pretty satisfied. Then I get wiped out by Chris and place last.

TIM Rich skitters around the edge of my base with his Hellions, roasting drones where they're found. I'm getting Spine Crawlers but he's getting Siege Tanks. They break my back. Fair play to Rich. He is quite good at this. I'm out.

CHRIS My gold base has given me the resources to get twelve Void Rays out very quickly, and



"Left the game" suggests that it was a choice...

Rich is busy attacking Tim. The writing's on the wall. It says: 'TIME FOR SPACE LASERS'.

TOM I'm down with Tim's plan of all ganging up on Rich. My offensive plan is to go Mutalisk-Mutalisk-Mutalisk. Mutalisks cost 100 minerals and 100 gas. I have 4,500 minerals and 0 gas. I have not thought this through.

RICH That's Tim done! Now I just need to do that twice more. I wonder what the other guys are doing? Tom's always complaining about clicking too fast, and Chris... Chris has played before, he knows what he's doing. Chris has 15 Void Rays and four Carriers. Ah.

CHRIS My plan is to avoid over-committing to eliminating anyone. I attack Rich with Void Rays, but leave him crippled rather than dead. I pull my fleet out, reinforce it, and send it towards Tom.

RICH My last Thors wither under Void Ray fire. I'm out. GG guys. You bastards.

TOM Hmm, there's an awful lot of pink in my base. I don't think my units are pink.

CHRIS It takes a little while, but after taking down Tom's Mutalisks there's not much he can do to stop the inevitable. My gold-for-lasers plan paid off, and I take the game.

WINNER
CHRIS

THE SCORES SO FAR

CHRIS	5
GRAHAM	3
TOM	2
RICH	2
TIM	0

WorldMags.net

EVENT 3

NIDHOGG

The Task
Win a league of *Nidhogg*'s swordfighting

The Rules
No floor-skating control hackery. Wildebeest move permitted. One point per match won

TOM Graham and I have played a lot of *Nidhogg*, a multiplayer swordfighting game. In our matches we learned that having your sword in the lowest position beats pretty much everything except the same tactic, so we just stabbed each other's shins forever, hoping the other player would slip up. When one of us did, we'd be able to continue onwards towards our opponent's side of the level and, if we were really lucky, get far enough to be eaten by the giant sandworm of victory.

It quickly becomes clear that Rich knows how to disarm from a low-stab, Tim knows the rapid-sliding exploit that lets you cut through it, and Graham is better at it than me. I am only able to beat Chris, who has never played before.

RICH Owen and I played a lot of *Nidhogg*. So much *Nidhogg* that Owen developed a move he titled 'the Wildebeest', where he tucked his swordsman into a crouch and lumbered towards his opponent screeching. So much *Nidhogg* that we discovered how to disarm efficiently. So much that I progress to the *Nidhogg* final.

CHRIS I've never played *Nidhogg* before, but I do have several years of actual fencing experience. This is of no use whatsoever. Problems I encounter include not knowing which man I am, which has rarely been an issue in real life. I also frequently accidentally throw my sword away, and have a tendency to leap squarely into any large hole that presents itself. I lose every one of my matches.

GRAHAM I am the equivalent of a fourth-place finish in the 100m sprint. No medal, no fame, no face on a box of cereal. Just an almost-ran with low self-esteem and a lifetime of shin pain. My strategy had been to mix constant low attacks with occasional risky slides under my opponent. I won my games against Chris and Tom, but a long, aching loss against Tim in my first match and a quick finish against Rich in my last mean I'm out of the running.

TIM The rest of the team went through a stage of playing *Nidhogg* every night. I didn't join in, except to yell at them to stop having so much noisy fun. So it's a pleasant surprise when, after a gruelling 10-minute match, I beat Graham. And then Tom. Hang on. I'm okay at this. Chris next, and he turns out to be mostly incapable. Without warning, I'm suddenly in the final with Rich.

Is that a... chandelier?

The victory screen knows how to make you feel good.

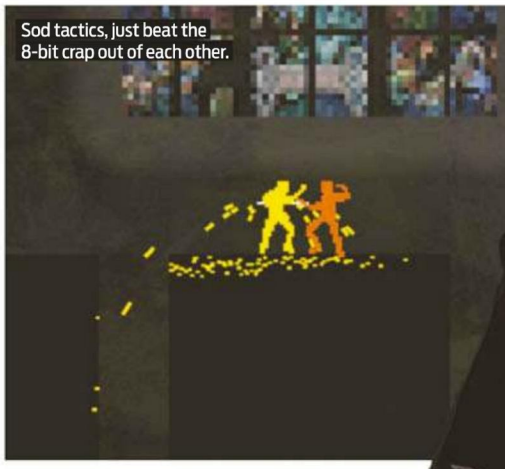
The Finalists

TIM I've worked out the secret to my success. I am the orange guy who is running right to left. I walk over to Rich's PC. He's already taken the seat with the controls for the orange guy. This is going to be a disaster.

It is a major disaster. Rich finally has a victory under his belt and is therefore insufferable.

RICH Dispatching the other, lesser *Nidhogg*lists was trivial, giving me ample opportunity to perform my favourite move: waggling my sword around inside the body of a pierced foe, looking into their real-life eyes and screaming "NIIIIDHOOOOOGG!" Tim, with three wins under his belt, should be tougher.

I slide under his sword and run for the exit, stopping only to deflect an artlessly chucked weapon. I am the greatest man who has ever, and will ever, live! Bow to me, peons!


Sod tactics, just beat the 8-bit crap out of each other.

WorldMags.net

EVENT 4

QWOP

The Task
Reach the longest distance possible in *QWOP*

The Rules
Five minutes to get as far as possible in *QWOP*, with as many restarts as needed within that time

TIM I've only ever seen *QWOP* played by someone else. It's a simple web game in which you play as an athlete on a running track. Q and W work your thighs, O and P flex your calves. I spend my first two minutes oscillating my poor man backwards. Distance achieved: -1.2m. Going well.

CHRIS There's a trick to *QWOP*. You start by throwing your runner into a lunge, and then you drag yourself along on your knees. It looks silly but it's stable. A minute in and I've hit 11m. Then I get overexcited and accidentally do a backflip.

RICH "Aha!" I think. "I know that trick! I'll use it against my fellow *QWOP*ers." My runner performs the start of a backflip and lands on his nose. -0.7m.

GRAHAM I push timidly at the buttons and settle onto one of my knees. I push Q, then W, then O, and shimmy pathetically forwards a few tenths of a metre. The O seems sort of extraneous, so I drop it. Q. Then W. Then Q, W. Q, W, Q, W. QWQWQ WQW. I seem to have lucked in to Chris's trick.

TOM Q! W! Q! W! P! O! P! 2m!!! O! O!!!! O??? P??? 1.5m? 1m?? 0.7m???

TIM I'm still at the startline, doing backflips. I ask how everyone else is doing. I turn to Graham's screen and feel baffled and amazed. His legs are stretched out, forwards and behind, and he's using his groin to propel himself forward. That is disgusting. I can't stop watching.

TOM 5m and counting!

GRAHAM Chris yells out something about falling over. Yes! I shimmy my way to 10m, then shudder on to 20m. I'm winning! QWQWQWQW.

RICH Graham is cheating, I decide. The game's called *QWOP*, not *QW*, and I'm sure I'll be using my calves in my winning sprint to the finish. 0.2m. Getting closer.

TOM Q! W! PP! Q! W! PP! Q! W! PP! 10m! Q! W! PP! 15m! Q! W! PP! 20m!

GRAHAM Oh god, there's a hurdle. I shout to the office: "Oh god, there's a hurdle!" I flinch into it, knocking it over. I realise I can just keep slithering and take it with me! My front foot arcs over it, trapping it between my legs. This is fine.

TOM 30m! 40m! QWPP FTW! O is a myth. O will destroy you. Winners don't use O.

CHRIS There's a hurdle! Perhaps this will stop Graham in his tracks. It doesn't.

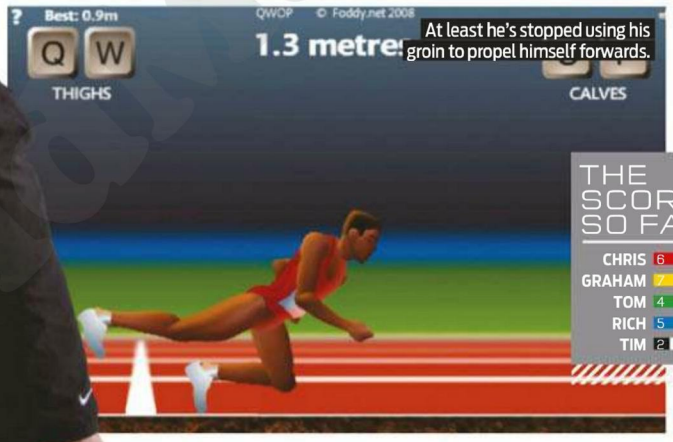
TOM We're all so bad at *QWOP* that we never even knew what *event* we were competing in – I always thought it was the 100m sprint. Apparently it's the hurdles, and apparently there's a hurdle in my crotch now.

TIM There's no way I'm going to catch Graham and Tom with their unrepentant crab-based cheating. I settle for just figuring out how to lurch effectively. 4m. 5m. I AM A CRAB TOO!

GRAHAM I reach 62m, and it suddenly all gets too much. For whatever reason, I've lost the ability to vibrate any further.

TOM Q! Q! Q! HNNNNG! The hurdle destroys me. I never manage to writhe off it, my knee-scraping tactic no longer works, and I can't even groin-shuffle as far as the next one. I only make it to 52.7m, and then collapse in a defeated heap on the wooden obstacle rammed into my shorts.

TIM I place fourth, Rich comes last. He looks sad though. Moral victory?



THE SCORES SO FAR

CHRIS	6
GRAHAM	7
TOM	4
RICH	5
TIM	2

WorldMags.net

EVENT 5

MMOARATHON

RICH Tim tells us our destination. "Oh, Sylvanas's throne room in the Undercity. Through the Barrens, and get the Zeppelin from Orgrimmar." I don't know where those are, but I take an early lead anyway.

TIM If I don't at least place in this, I'll be grumpy. I've been playing *World of Warcraft* for years, and know my way around. We start as a group, racing through the plains over the hills with a gentle camaraderie. Then Chris gets eaten by a wolf.

GRAHAM I played *WoW* for two months at release, and then left it behind. That said, my race starts fine. I keep pace with Rich and Tim, and leap the wall into the Northern Barrens.

TOM Everyone else has picked a cow-related name punning on a famous runner, and I was just about to click Accept on the name 'Cowch', but instead hastily Wiki the fastest marathon runner in the world to see if he has any kind of cow-like syllable in his name: Patrick Makau. Oh Patrick. I am immediately eaten by a wolf.

TIM When I planned this, I thought we'd pass through the gates of Thunder Bluff and have a gentle stroll through the Barrens. But there's been a *Cataclysm* since I last played. Apparently it's kind of a big deal. We leap over a brand new gate and into the Lower Barrens. It's a level 25+ zone.

CHRIS Everyone's getting mercilessly killed by velociraptors, but I get the idea to climb a mountain near a graveyard, and manage to cut off a major chunk of jungle. It leads to a path up and around the Alliance camp that'll soon give the others so much trouble. I've established a pretty big lead.

GRAHAM After half a dozen deaths in the Northern Barrens and the Alliance camp, I find the mountain path Chris has been using. The problem? I follow it all the way in to Ashenvale, the wrong neighbouring region. I get trapped there for another dozen deaths, and it all but knocks me out of the race.

RICH I'm in Ashenvale! I heard someone say that name a moment ago. "Chris, how far through Ashenvale did you get?" "I didn't go through Ashenvale," he replies. Oh.

A moment of peace.

The Task
Race in *World of Warcraft* from the Tauren starting area to the Undercity throne room

The Rules
Must use the Zeppelin at Orgrimmar

CHRIS After 30 minutes of being eaten by lions, raptors, and a crocodile, I hit the sands of Durotar. Orgrimmar's just ahead! I run to the new zeppelin stand, and I'm on my way to the Undercity as Tim and Tom enter Orgrimmar.

TIM This is the least fun ever: an hour of corpse runs and dashing forward 15ft at a time. Through sheer bloodymindedness I corpse-hop to the shores of Durotar neck-and-neck with Rich, where we both get eaten. I break free first, and meet Tom in Orgrimmar.

RICH I get into Orgrimmar just in time to see Tom and Tim standing on the Zeppelin post. I sprint for the lift, hop on, and ride it upwards. I'm going to make it, to fight it out for third! I exit out of the wrong side of the lift, panic, turn around, and fall back down the liftshaft. I watch forlornly as the Zeppelin sails off without me.

CHRIS I reach the Undercity and spend the last 20 minutes of the contest naked in the Undercity throne room, egging the others on and dancing with my flaming Murloc pet. Victory is weird.

GRAHAM I arrive in Orgrimmar a few minutes later just in time to see fourth-placed Rich float away to the Undercity. I wait for a while, then get on the wrong Zeppelin to Stranglethorn. I place last, while Rich takes fourth.

TOM Tim and I have the same idea: throw ourselves off the Zeppelin as it passes the Undercity. We respawn at the graveyard inside and sprint for the finish.

TIM OH GODDAMMIT. In the final dash to the throne room, I turn right into the engineering trainer, rather than into the throne room. I feel like a buffoon. I'm so angry that I could... and then for some random reason, I level up. Ah, *WoW*. You've still got it. Moral victory?

The udders were really milking the bovine jokes.

WINNER
CHRIS

WorldMags.net

EVENT 6

BUTTON MASH

GRAHAM 'BUTTON' stands for Brutally Unfair Tactics Totally Okay Now. Each round begins with a command to act like a robot, for example, or to pose like a ninja or hold another player's hand. Then it gives you the win or fail condition. "Any player whose button is held for 15 seconds loses." "Press your button seven times exactly to win," and so on. All hell breaks loose every time.

CHRIS The first task we're given is to stare into another player's eyes. I'm next to Tom. "For how long?" we both cry, immediately prioritising mechanical clarity over human intimacy.

RICH The game tells us to do 10 sit-ups. Five men flop to their arses and start grunting away. I'm on seven when I look over at Graham: he's lifting his head slightly, his face barely troubled with the exertion of a man hardly trying. I'm thrown off my rhythm as he cheerily blurts out "10!" and scrambles for the pad.

The Task
Win three rounds of indie party game *BUTTON*

The Rules
In the event of a tie, a playoff will be held. No biting, hair pulling or nipple twisting

CHRIS "The most intelligent player, take one step forward," says the game. Graham, Rich and Tim step forward in unison. Tom and I remain still, then high-five. A moral victory.

RICH I realise that the closer I hold the pad to my crotch, the less willing my opponents are to make a grab for it.

TIM I have flashbacks to school rugby. We're in a maul, and Rich is one of the baddies. I tear the ball out of his hands and press my button 13 times. Winner!

TOM Tim and I get three wins each, so we're down to a two-player tie-breaker. We tie twice. On the third round, he goes to such lengths to hide it that the safety disconnect on the controller comes loose, and we both lose.

GRAHAM Rich, Chris and I fight it out for third place. Whoever's button is pressed seven times loses. I can't remember what buttons belong to Rich and Chris, so I focus on pulling their fingers away from my 'P'. Then I pull the question mark off the keyboard.

RICH My hand was nowhere near your 'P'.

WINNER
TOM

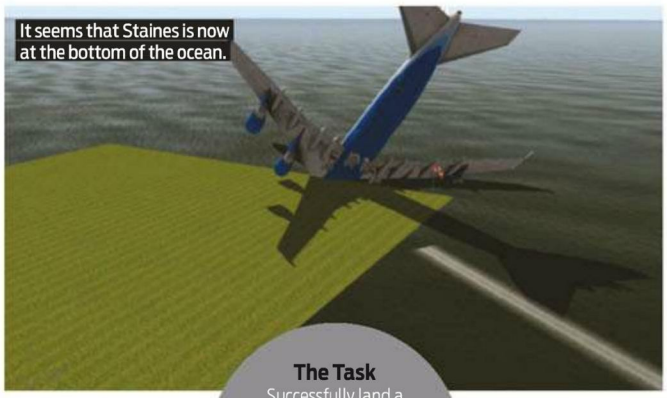
THE SCORES SO FAR

CHRIS	10
GRAHAM	9
TOM	7
RICH	5
TIM	5

WorldMags.net

EVENT 7

X-PLANE


It seems that Staines is now at the bottom of the ocean.

The Task
Successfully land a plane on a runway

The Rules
Land at Gatwick airport, starting from three nautical miles away, at midday, in fair weather

GRAHAM *X-Plane 10* comes on eight double-sided DVDs and is one of the most complex flight simulators in the world. We're playing the demo version, which contains the landscapes for the Pacific Northwest. Airports like Gatwick, our destination, float in a featureless ocean void.

My advantage is that I've read a bit of the manual. My disadvantage is that I'm going first and everyone is listening to me, learning from my mistakes. My mistakes: "It's not slowing down, I can't slow down." "My landing gear is still up!" "I'm on the ground! No, wait, I'm in the air again." "I'm bouncing. This is bouncing." "I'm off the end of the runway, in the water." "I'll scrape the wings in the ocean and use the drag as a brake." "I've stopped. It's stopped now. I'm probably alive. This went well, I think."

TOM Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We're experiencing some kind of joystick issue that's causing us to bank hard left at all times.

Ladies and gentlemen, control has just informed me that the banking issue is "just a thing" and that I should "go with it".

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for your patience. I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the ocean, and ask that you please do not unfasten your seatbelts until the aircraft has come to a complete stop on the seabed.

RICH I hate flying, but I always tell people I'd be fine if *I* was able to fly the plane. *X-Plane* proves I'm rubbish at flying planes. I try to descend and manage to ascend instead, necessitating a vomit-spewing turnaround for another go at the runway. Second time around I drop, but far too fast. I plop onto the runway at 45° to vertical and a few hundred miles an hour. The wings bend beyond breaking point and the game pauses, mourning the loss of 300 pretend people.

TIM I shoo Graham away as he tries to explain the controls. Bro, I got this. I've seen the Krypton Factor, and I know how this works. I pull back on the throttle, and point the nose down. In response, my plane accelerates dramatically and the nose points up. What the hell, Graham? I have another go, and plonk the plane slap down in the middle of the runway. I'm still going at about a hundred miles an hour. Stop. STOP. Graham, how do I stop? I don't stop. Moral victory?

CHRIS Oh no. It's that dream again. The one where I'm flying a plane and I don't know how and Gatwick is surrounded by ocean, for some reason. I pitch towards the runway and try to keep her level, and for all my efforts I actually succeed in touching down at the right angle and with the landing gear deployed. The only problem is that I can't stop. I pull up and attempt to come around for another pass, but overdo it and end up plowing nose-first into the ocean.

"That was the worst possible thing you could have done," says Rich helpfully.

WINNER
GRAHAM

WorldMags.net

EVENT 8

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

CHRIS I've booted up in practice mode prior to our match and made sure my sensitivity setting is perfect. I'm tied with Graham for the entire Lolympics at 10 points each. I'm breathing deeply. I have to explode enough men to win the gold.

TIM My strong *X-Plane* showing means that I'm not out of the running for a podium finish. I just need to stop laughing at Rich's character first – he's picked the orange Skaarj War Cow. It floats like a bovine balloon, spewing Instagib laser. I'm dead, dead, and dead again.

The Task
Win a deathmatch in the classic multiplayer shooter

The Rules
Battle on DM_Morpheus's low gravity skyscrapers, with the Instagib mutator on. The first to 40 kills wins

TOM As soon as I spawn, I jump out into the wide open, central area that can be seen from all angles, through which you drift in a predictable arc with almost no control over your movement. I'm killed immediately. As soon as I spawn, I jump out into the wide open, central area, and am killed immediately. As soon as I spawn, I jump out into the central area and am killed immediately.

GRAHAM I begin by pressing A to sidestep around a corner, and instead discover that WASD isn't bound to movement. I fix that, press A, accidentally tap it twice, and dodge into the void. Score so far: -1.

RICH The Instagib mod pins electronic pulse rifles to everyone's hands. It's a great, powerful weapon, but standing still to aim reduces me to 1999's vision of an expanding cloud of viscera. I decide to stop standing still and return to leaping between rooftops. It looks like I have a plan. I don't.

Dead, dead and dead again.

TOM With the deftness of a trained ninja, I increase the mouse sensitivity factor, swiftly backspacing out the '3.00' and elegantly tapping out '4.00'. I expertly uncheck 'Mouse smoothing' and recheck 'Direct Input'. DOUBLE CHECK!

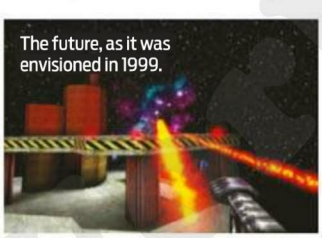
CHRIS I've established an aerial circuit around Morpheus' rooftops, brutally interrupting other people's duels like laser Batman. It's going well: for the first 10 points, I'm holding onto a two- to three-point lead.

TIM The mood has changed. The giggles are silenced as, suddenly, our competitive spirits awaken. I'm suddenly five points down and languishing in fourth place.

TOM Remembering my Sun Tsu, I dynamically change strategy mid-fight. I *un*check Direct Input, *re*check Mouse Smoothing, and in my haste accidentally uncheck Mouse Look entirely. MULTI-CHECK! I recheck Mouse Look. CHECKING SPREE!

GRAHAM I'm in second place! I am *miles* behind Chris in first. It's looking like he's going to win everything, although there's still hope, assuming I don't waste any time. So I spend a full minute circle-strafing round Tom, unable to hit him.

CHRIS I can't think about how far ahead I am. I am seriously far ahead. After every death I crick my neck and take a deep breath, but it's just a show. I'm losing it,


The future, as it was envisioned in 1999.

The game that stole whole years of our youth.

and the eight-kill spread is rapidly dwindling.

RICH I get a flash of my younger self, listening to terrible ska and mainlining *UT* for hours at a time. My wrist reaches back through time to borrow that teenager's mouse hand.

TIM I'm on a killing spree, shifting from fourth, to third and heading for first – 20 kills to go. Rich, Graham, Chris and myself are practically neck and neck. Tom is not.

TOM MEGA-CHECK! ULTRA-CHECK! M-M-M-M-MONSTER CHECK!!!! HOLY SHIT!

GRAHAM I've caught up with Chris! We're tied for first place! Wait, third place is also... wait. The table is tied. Well, almost tied. Chris, Tim and I are sitting space-pretty on 35 kills apiece. Tom has (cough) 18 (cough).

CHRIS I'm chasing a bulbous orange cow across the rooftops of the future, and I can't land a hit. All I want is to watch Rich explode. I see him stand still for a fraction of a second. My heart leaps, and then he shoots me.

GRAHAM Okay. Okay. Five kills against three opponents, and Tom. I just need to focus, shoot straight, and place higher than Chris. Do that and I'll win. I could win the whole Lolympics!

RICH I watch as Chris hurtles past, and nail him. My next shot slams into Tim, trying to scoot away. I spot Tom two floors down, and lance a bolt into him. Chris and a respawned Tim are scuffling on a rooftop: I nail them both in two consecutive shots. I only need one more kill to win the match. Graham appears, right in the path of my electrocharged pulse rifle.

GRAHAM Instead of winning, I burst. Rich "overall joint last" McCormick wins. Tim is second, I place fourth, and Chris... Chris... I can't even say it.

WINNER
RICH

THE LOLYMPIC CHAMPION IS...

CHRIS

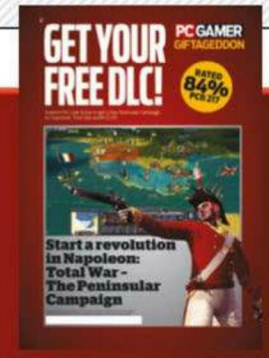
"It was an emotional and unbearably sexy rollercoaster of palid hairiness but I damn well nailed it!"

THE SCORES

CHRIS	11
GRAHAM	10
TOM	9
RICH	9
TIM	9

WorldMags.net

GIFTAGEDDON!



If you're going to have a war, you may as well have it somewhere sunny. That's why this month we're pleased to be giving away one of the best bits of *Total War* DLC in the form of *Napoleon: Total War*'s Spain-set *Peninsular Campaign*. Like its predecessor *Empire*, *Napoleon* has come into its own after a shaky start, and this expansion is a great way to see the game at its best. A word of warning: suntan lotion is important, but it won't protect you from cannon fire.

Tim Edwards

TIM EDWARDS
EDITOR
pcgamer@futurenet.com

"Wait, these things fire bullets, too?

NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR
THE PENINSULAR CAMPAIGN

SPANISH HOMIES Command and conquer in the Iberian sun

The war in the Spanish peninsula between 1811 and 1814 is the conflict that gave the world the term 'guerrilla' warfare. Play as the new Spanish faction and you'll need to think on your feet, using new units that include *Total War*'s first hit-and-run forces that can be deployed anywhere on the battlefield.

The campaign supports play as the French and British, too. Napoleon is faced with squashing unrest across 32 new regions, while the British use their colonial resources to liberate territory in return for local support. The expansion also adds new agents, including Provocateurs who incite unrest and Guerrilleros who can harass enemy armies, rooting them in place.

We gave it 84% back in PCG 217, praising the excellent Spanish and British campaigns and the variety provided by the 28 new units. All this is waiting for you – just claim your code and you'll be waging war across España before you know it.

What does this code give me?
The full DLC pack worth £5.99 on Steam. It requires the full version of *Napoleon: Total War* to play.

How do I redeem my code?
Launch Steam, then click 'Games' followed by 'Activate a product on Steam'. Enter your code, and follow the instructions.

My code doesn't work!
Don't panic. If your code returns an error, we'll replace it. Send us an email at *pcgamer.giftageddon@futurenet.com* with proof of purchase, and we'll sort you right out.

WorldMags.net

THE GOOD KIND OF BROWSER-BASED

Over 4 million gamers visit PCGamer.com every month.

Join them.

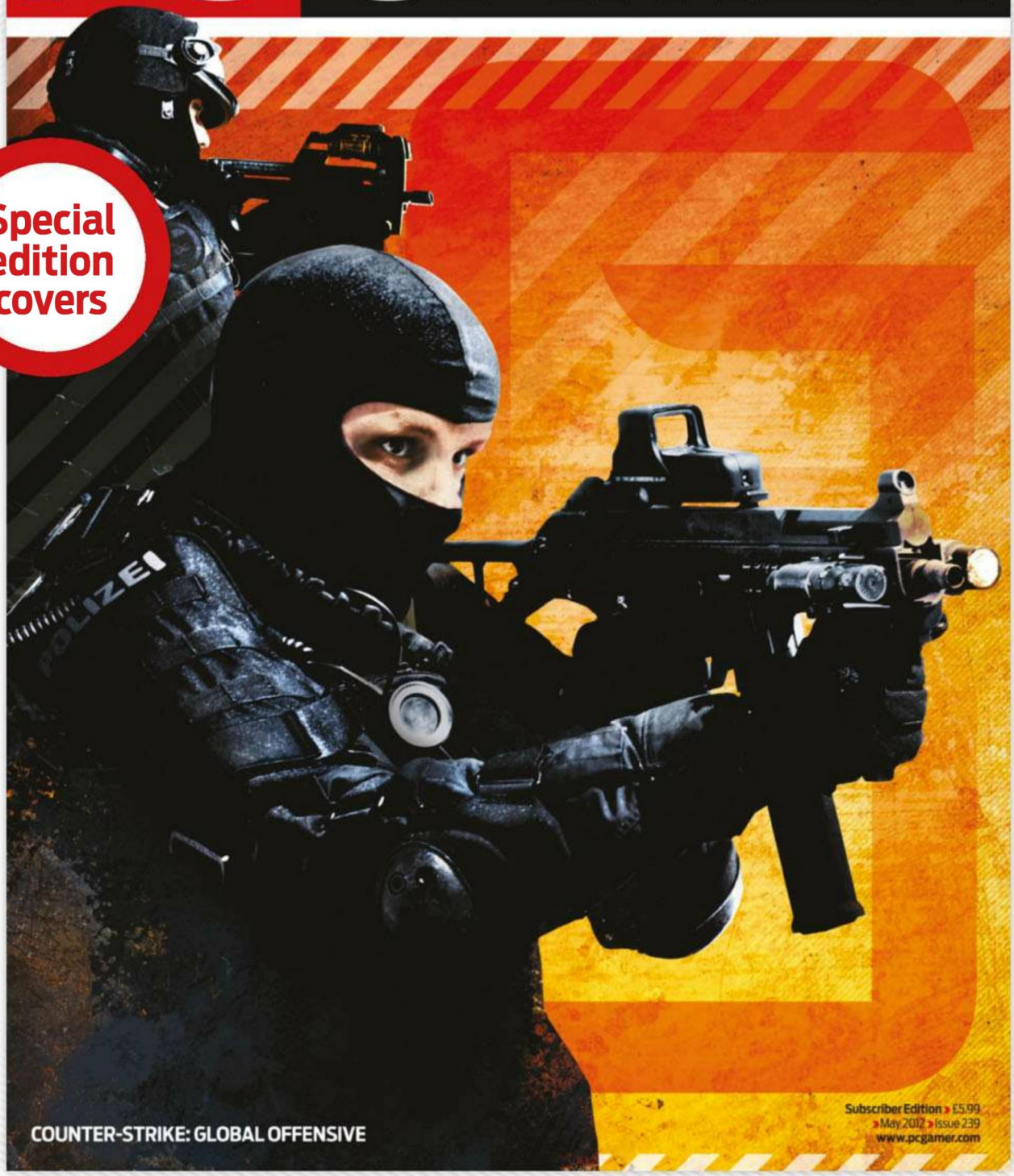
THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PC GAMES WEBSITE

PC GAMER

WorldMags.net

THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PC GAMES MAGAZINE

PC GAMER



MORE GREAT REASONS TO SUBSCRIBE...

- You're guaranteed to get your copy!
- You'll get it before copies appear in shops.
- It's delivered direct to your door!
- Free codes with every issue

Subscribe to PC GAMER

WORTH £50

and get a FREE Radon Opto gaming mouse!

The Opto is an eight-button optical mouse with an adjustable tracking resolution of up to 3500dpi. It comes with five removable weights to let you customise its heft, built-in memory to store configuration profiles and macros, and even a system to adjust the direction from which the cable connects. It also has a big squiggly 'O' written on it, so there's that.

ozone GAMING GEAR

For more information please visit *ozonegaming.com*

PLUS

SAVE 28%

PAY ONLY £27.99 BY 6-MONTHLY DIRECT DEBIT

TWO SIMPLE WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE...

ONLINE

www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/pcgp1r

BY PHONE

0844 848 2852 (quote ref: PCGP1R)

Lines are open 8:00am-9:30pm weekdays
8.00am-4pm Saturdays

Offer for UK Direct Debit subscribers to the print edition only. You will receive 13 issues per year. Your subscription will start with the next available issue. Minimum subscription term is 12 months. The gift is subject to availability. In the unlikely event of stocks becoming exhausted, we reserve the right to substitute items of a similar value. Please allow up to 60 days for delivery of your gift. If at any time during the first 60 days you are dissatisfied in any way please notify us in writing and we will refund you for all un-mailed issues. Offer ends: May 23rd, 2012. For overseas subscriptions please visit www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk. Full details of the Direct Debit guarantee will be provided and are available upon request.

magsdirect

SEND

EMAIL pcgamer@futurenet.com
TWITTER @PC_Gamer
FORUM www.pcgamer.com/forum
WRITE PC Gamer, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW UK

Best games, bad games and BarCraft

SPK UR MND

■ I know why they do it, but I wish that Steam allowed you to roll back changes or select updates incrementally so when the publisher goes wrong, as with *Skyrim*, in this case I could roll back to the vanilla version.
James Firth
Agreed. It's rarely critical, but every now and again a developer will do something mean like remove the console or release a broken patch (hello, Super Meat Boy), and there's nothing more frustrating than Steam going "What?"

■ BioWare have launched a campaign asking their fans to sign a petition to the UK government. While maybe initially clever and funny, it has a darker consequence. If the petition gained enough signatures that would mean important parliamentary time would be dedicated to a frivolous advertisement.
Dylan Saul
We applaud anything that can derail our politicians.

■ Hey! I just bought the Newsstand issue of PC Gamer, but I don't see my free game codes? Who do I need to threaten with physical violence to get my hands on them?
Sam Easter
Chuck Norris. When he's finished with you though, check your email. If you opt-in, you'll get a message from Tim every month with the codes you need. And if you're nice to him, maybe even an exclusive massage. Ooh.

Play devil's advocate

Having read your Face Off article about whether all games should have a multiplayer mode, I feel compelled to argue the other side. Tom lost the argument badly, possibly because he actually likes multiplayer and is having to play devil's advocate.

Anyway, I come down squarely on the 'no' side. I don't want to have to rely on my broadband being up. I don't like griefing people, and would much rather slaughter my way through NPCs in amusing ways. I never play the multiplayer version of any singleplayer game I buy anyway, and would rather the money was spent on making that side better.
Joe Reed

Wow, if you were real, this would be seriously dickish of me.

Admirable sentiments, Joe, but you do know that you don't actually have to grief people if you don't want to, right? It's rarely compulsory, and when it is, it's simply known as 'playing the game'.
PCG

Ready for offline

I go offshore for long periods of time. It's a confined space with people in stressful conditions. I love having an escape, like *Fallout* or *Deus Ex* – another world I can escape to. This is so important to me that I lug my huge gaming laptop around the world with me.

When I know I am going away, I ensure Steam is up to date and ready for offline mode. I even launch the games in offline mode to check everything is OK. But there have been times when Steam will demand an update when I arrive on the boat and lock out offline mode. After so much effort, it's heartbreaking!

When we get a port call and everyone else is getting drunk, I'm traipsing around with the giant laptop looking for a web cafe in a foreign land. All for the 30 seconds it takes to get offline mode again. That it sometimes catches me out even with all my planning really upsets me. It makes such a difference to my quality of life out there.
Thom Linley

"Everyone else is getting drunk, I'm traipsing around with a laptop"

Steam is a great service, but more absolutely has to be done to support the millions of offline players like Thom.
PCG

THE HOT MAIL

Money in theory

People keep telling me that PC gaming is expensive.

I don't see it myself, so I sat down and worked it out. With the hefty licensing fees added to the price of console titles and the subscription fees for online multiplayer services, I figure I've saved around £380 in the two years since I bought this machine, and that's without factoring-in that nearly everyone who owns a console has at least a budget PC or laptop for browsing the internet and word processing, which I don't need, because this baby does it all.

Just thought I should try to get this in print to shut up my console-playing friends who claim that they can't afford PC gaming – when they're clearly the ones throwing money away on their gaming habits.

Though I should point out that I've only saved money in theory. My friends might buy a new title once every two months, whereas I'm seen to be showing great restraint if I can go seven days without buying another game. I'd get professional help but psychiatrists are expensive.
Martin Donald

Look on the bright side! The money you save in theory can buy many more games in reality! (Is that how economics works? All those numbers are confusing when not attached to some kind of +2 sword or the stats sheet of a Sherman tank).

For your financial diligence though, you deserve a prize. And we know just the one.
PCG

The best missive we receive every issue will win its sender a shock-proof 32GB USB drive worth £70, courtesy of our lovely friends at Corsair. Find out about these gadgets at www.corsair.com. See above for how to get in touch with PC Gamer!

Attend one there

I know/sheepishly admit that I'm a bit late in reading issue 235 of PCG. It's something I should have done as soon as the mag was delivered. However, I had a flick through it and was very happy to see a whole page listing some BarCraft events in the

UK. I had been watching matchcasts up till then on Gom TV's site and on *www.mlg.tv*, which telecasts the e-sports in the USA. I am a huge fan of the original *StarCraft* and love *SC2* as well, although I don't play on the ladder. Sadly, I know I'm just not good enough.

So, being in possession of details of some venues/organisers I was looking forward to attending one such event. Sadly, there were none in Manchester that were mentioned in the mag.

I then asked a friend of mine in Leeds whether he would like to attend one there. He was fine with it. But then through the magic of social networking (Facebook on this occasion) I found a chap who organises BarCrafts in Manchester! I'm very excited about it, and would like to thank you for highlighting the increasing popularity of these events.
Sagir Parkar

We're glad you found one! Rich can't get enough of them, especially when they push out the boat with menus offering delights like BarCraft London's 'Stim Pack' (Tequila, tabasco and sambuca) or the 'Overlord Ventral Sac' (half a pint of onion rings). They do need more snappy pun names, though. We'd like to volunteer the non-alcoholic Zerg Crush for the bar, along with the slightly stronger Arcturus Menthe. Minty!
PCG

First adopted steam

I can't decide whether I am being selfish for personal reasons or passionate about my rights. I live in a conundrum where I have Steam: I'm moving forward with the times with digital distribution. Yet at the same time I am so staunchly against adapting EA's Origin platform that I will not play some of what would undoubtedly have been my new favourite games. *Mass Effect 3*, *Generals 2* and *Battlefield 3* will all be elusive, simply because I believe what EA was doing with its privacy policy is unfair.

But then I remembered from years ago when I first adopted Steam and the hatred directed at *Half-Life 2* and other games for needing an internet connection or removing the CD, and the fears that this was the end of PC gaming. I want these games on Steam, yet does this mean Valve deserves to have a monopoly on a market? Can any company be trusted not to take advantage?

I just wonder if I, and many others like me, are not getting Origin because of privacy, but simply because they have become the fan-boys of the new decade. I guess we don't always get our cake and eat it.
Ross MacDonald

Origin's main problem isn't anything intrinsic, but that EA have repeatedly blotted their copybook with previous attempts to go digital – such as asking for extra money if you want to re-download a game a year later. Gamers have been burned by EA Link and EA Downloader and the EA Store, and a change of name doesn't alter that. There's no reason why gamers won't accept it in time, however, if the service develops properly. Just look at Good Old Games.
PCG

It's OK, Doctor. You're not using Origin any more.

"It's a shame I won't get to enjoy *Mass Effect 3*. Why? Origin."

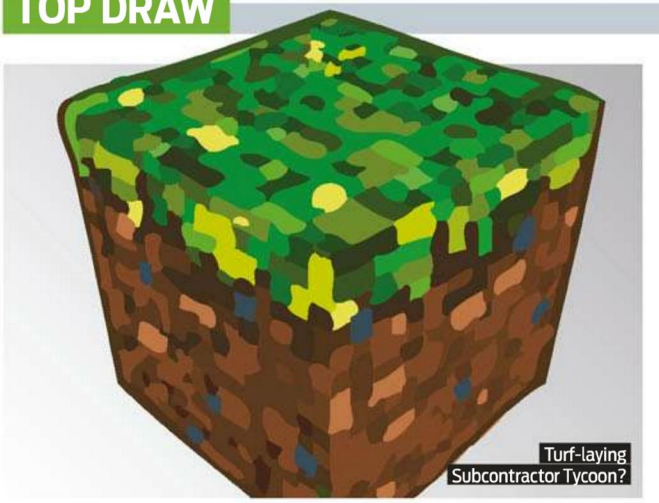
Getting nearly 100%

It's a shame I won't get to enjoy *Mass Effect 3*. Why? Origin. Why, EA, why? I'd really not mind getting another, crappier version of Steam in order to play it, if it didn't come with the clause to scan my computer's hardware and see what's in my hard drives. Steam does the same but it only scans what's in its own folder and asks you if you'd like to partake in a survey.

But then, considering how shoddy *Dragon Age 2* was compared to the first, maybe not playing *ME3* won't be so bad. I think EA has negatively rubbed off on BioWare.
John Murphy

It's your call of course, but it'd be a shame to miss out on* Mass Effect 3 *for that. Do you have anything particularly controversial fitted in your PC in the first place?
PCG

TOP DRAW


Turf-laying Subcontractor Tycoon?

Last issue's picture was of *Angry Birds*, but this month we're going with an indie theme with... uh... this. One second. Sophie? Sophie Taylor? Not exactly pushing the boat out on this one, were we?

Still, no matter. You win a Zinio subscription to PC Gamer anyway. Consider it encouragement for the rest of you to do something a little more ambitious next time. No prizes for guesses. But there are prizes for art. And for this.

Send your daubings to pcgamer@futurenet.com – the one we like the best wins a year's Zinio subscription to PC Gamer. No prizes for guessing the game, but the first to guess correctly gets their name in print.

SPK UR MND

Everyone's complaining about the recent trailers using something called 'dubstep'. Maybe I'm just not cool, but what is dubstep? Is it the sound of someone tripping over their front door, falling into a shrub, and not being able to talk properly at A&E?
Francis Abbott
Dubstep is listening to a ZX Spectrum struggling to load a game, through a phone, while standing too close to a speaker, with someone next to you kicking a bin into scrap metal. Or so we are reliably informed by listening to far too many examples of it recently.

What's the best PC I can get for £300?
Mark Kirby
A crap one.

I want to read some good gaming books on the train. Are there any that you can recommend? I'm thinking novels rather than comics and the like, but could do with a pointer to something that won't make me look stupid to any pretty girl sitting opposite. Do such things exist?
David Fenton
Not many, if we're honest. You're best off picking a series you like rather than a random book – Dragon Age/Mass Effect's are OK, as is the BioShock novel (though it's a bit pointless) and some of the Warcraft ones are worth a read. If all else fails, try the original Dooms. They're dreadful, but so utterly insane that you probably won't care that much.

I want to eat Uwe Boll. What kind of sauce goes best with film director?
Anonymous Cannibal
White wine, definitely.

They say the best things in life are free, so how do you explain *Hellgate: London?*
Graeme Worth
They say the devil has all the best tunes. They never said anything about games.

SEND

TXT UR REVIEW

Tweet your 140-character review to our Twitter account @PC_Gamer. Don't forget to include the game's name and a score.

Bastion
Great music, great art style and neat concise gameplay make for a short but memorable experience.
83%
Mogglewump

Fallout 3
It's absolutely fantastic. Plays really well on the PC too, uses mouse and keyboard well.
80%
JordanCapasso

Black Mirror
Dark, confusing, epic – an adventure as it should be.
92%
Grimtox

Machinarium
Wonderful art style, nice humorous touches and great satisfaction when you complete a puzzle.
87%
Meteoracle

Draconian laws

Firstly, I would like to thank you for your excellent coverage of SOPA and PIPA. As you have said in your posts on the PC Gamer website, these badly written laws would have an extremely negative impact on gaming. While I believe actors/writers/artists/developers, etc, deserve to be paid for their work, it is very difficult to feel sorry for the people who want to introduce these draconian laws. Valuing profits more than civil liberties is just pure greed.

They need to adapt to the new technology and move away from their failing business model. Focussing on new, better ways to distribute content would be a much better way to reduce piracy. Just look at how successful Steam has been.
Adam

The more SOPA and PIPA's proponents protest, the clearer it is that they live in a whole other reality. The death of these two acts doesn't mean the end of the fight, sadly – too many content industries desperately want them to go through for them to vanish silently in the night.
PCG

Lick frocks infolds

A pox on Valve! Do they not realise that we have precious little time to fit enough gaming into the day? Do they not care that any brief moment we have spare between our jobs and loved ones is not to be wasted on anything less than pure gaming? Is Gabe Newell leaning back in his golden throne, atop a pile of money, naked save for his one-of-a-kind 'Like a Boss' *TF2* hat, laughing with sick glee as another hapless gamer goes to *steam.com* instead of *steampowered.com*? Oh, and he knows. You know how?

Because Valve have owned *steam.com* all along!

You may roll your eyes, but think about it: *steam.com* is registered to one 'Clifford Skolnick'. A name which at first glance has little to do with Gabe Newell. Well look again, it doesn't just have little to do with

You won't find games at *steam.com*. Only disappointment.

"Don't you think that's a little convenient? I'm on to you, Newell"

Gabe, it has nothing to do with Gabe. Different nationalities, different number of syllables, different number of letters. I tried anagrams: lick frocks infolds, lawn be glee, clicks fold for ink, new leg bale. Nothing. There's no crossover. Don't you think that's a little convenient? Well, I'm on to you Newell. I'm on to you...
Julian Benson

We've been assured by Lew E Bagnel, a spokesman for InterNIC, that there is no sinister connection here.
PCG

YOU'RE PLAYING

James Glover
Currently playing
Waves

You know, technically a cliff in the difficulty curve is a good thing.

My hands hurt as I dodge right and swing down the screen, my gun swinging in the opposite direction as I take out the swarm of yellow at close range. I'm in the clear but if I'm to keep my multiplier, I can't dawdle. I veer off towards a growing cluster of explosive death, hitting slow motion to dart between two enemies. My bomb ready and waiting to go, but if I just hold off for a few... moments... longe- oh crap.

The heart of *Waves* is managing the risk-reward ratio. You can take the game at your own pace, but only by pushing yourself to your limits will you achieve your best scores. It manages to avoid the frustrating 'brick-wall' that can hamper many other dual-stick shooters. Dying is more often a result of you misjudging your skill than the game throwing more at you than you can handle, and very rarely a result of anything 'unfair.' While a glance at the screen suggests *Waves* works much better with a gamepad, I've found it's easily playable with a keyboard and mouse – albeit at the expense of finer movement control.

The game provides six modes. Survival, Rush and Crunch Time alter the balance between the need for speed, power and survivability; Bombing Run and Chase require you to move quickly from one target to another, favouring those with manoeuvrability and path-finding skills. Finally, Challenge mode is all about accuracy, and being efficient with shots.

Waves is the first dual stick shooter to really capture my attention, delivering on 'easy to learn, hard to master,' without sticking a cliff in the difficulty curve.

crucial Tell us about the game you love, and why, in 300 words. Write to the usual place, and include your name and a photo. The best piece each month wins 2GB of Crucial Ballistix RAM carefully chosen for their PC by Crucial's experts – see *www.crucial.com/uk*.

WIN!

SERIOUS ABOUT HARDWARE?

PERFORMANCE ADVICE FOR SERIOUS GAMERS ON SALE EVERY MONTH

PLAY

JOIN OUR WORLD OF FRIENDLY FIRE

The PC Gamer community is a little old place where we can get together. And shoot each other.

GAMER DIARY

APR

16
Spring cleaning
Dust off your pickaxe and take a holiday on our *Minecraft* server.

27
***Risen 2* released**
Swords-and-pirates RPG sequel. Call each other landlubbers at *pcgamer.com/forum*.

MAY

01
***TERA* released**
Action MMO with twitch-based combat and innovative PvP.

04
May the fourth be with you
Celebrate Star Wars day with a spot of *The Old Republic*. Bring your own bathrobe.

09
PCG 240 released
The birds are singing, flowers are blossoming, Remain indoors and read PC Gamer.

THE PC GAMER STEAM COMMUNITY POPULATION 46,985

If you're reading this, then it's statistically likely that you're already a member of the PC Gamer Steam community. If not, you need to take a long, hard look at yourself. Then you need to take a long, hard look at your PC. Then you need to switch it on. Then you need to take a long, hard look at the instructions below.

PCG's Steam group is the best place for you to find companionship in the game of your choice. We run servers for the top multiplayer shooters of the day, and guilds in a wide array of MMOs from *WoW* to *EVE*. If you can't find what you're looking for through Steam, be sure to post on our forums at *pcgamer.com/forum*.

HOSTED BY MULTIPLAY

IP 83.222.240.186 **Port** 28265
If our themed build contests don't strike your fancy, request your own patch of land and get to work on an original idea.

IP 85.236.100.18 **Port** 27115
The sun has got his hat on, but he's also brought a rocket launcher. Best to take shelter on our *TF2* server.

IP 85.236.100.18 **Port** 27615
Here's an idea for a fun day out: let's run for our lives through a crowd of people who want to eat us. No takers? Really?

URL bit.ly/pcgbf3
We'll fight them on the beaches, and then we'll have a bit of a sunbathe. Then we'll fly a jet into the sea.

HOW TO JOIN THE STEAM COMMUNITY

STEP 1
If you don't already have a Steam account, head to *www.steampowered.com*, download the client, run it and sign up.

STEP 2
Install your games from the Steam client. If you're having technical problems, hit the forums at the Steam site.

STEP 3
In the community tab of the Steam client, search for PC Gamer and join our group. Then chat, play and troll to your heart's content.

PLAYER OF THE MONTH

Who? Belimawr
Where? *The Old Republic*
Why? Overseeing the Mint Imperials' Republican sister guild, the Revel Alliance.

Build me a river

The PCG community carves out a countryside getaway

Block-master Ctrl has overseen the first of several new invitational build competitions for the best of the PCG *Minecraft* community. The theme was 'riverside' and the contest featured newbie Khendon22, Frogofspac, city-builder WebberNI and veteran Spardin.

Each player was given a floating 20x20x12 area to build in and a limited supply of materials each day. Beginning with only dirt, gravel and sand, they were slowly fed more and more advanced block types.

BUILD SOME STUFF

Most started out by carving a river with sloping banks, followed by bridges and the foundations of houses. The only player not to go for a home by the water was Spardin, who opted for a park-style scene with benches and picnic tables.

On the fifth and final day the builders were at last given water to play with. Most chose to fill their rivers the old-fashioned way, but Khendon left some space to give his scene a sense of free-flowing motion. The winner, however, was Spardin – his attention to detail clinched it, particularly the way he used signs as the arm-rests for his riverside benches. ■

A river. If you live in East Anglia.

Meanwhile, in a country where water isn't privatised.

RED 5 STANDING BY

TOR guild The PC Gamer Mint Imperials have a healthy raiding scene: our advanced Operations groups regularly tackle high-level encounters Eternity Vault and Karagga's Palace. Raid team Red 5 recently took on the Eternity Vault for the first time, with a roster of mostly first-time players and only a few veterans to provide direction.

The first boss – Annihilation Droid XRR-3 – turns out a massive amount of damage with his rocket launchers but PCG's superior firepower was able to bring him down quickly. The second boss, Gharj, also fell quickly despite repeated attempts to punt the group into boiling lava.

The third boss is a puzzle where each group has to line up lights on a pair of ancient pylons as high-level monsters descend on them. PCG were eventually overwhelmed, but not before Sith Sorcerer Cyhyraeth managed to click the last light and end the encounter. After scraping themselves back up off the ground they made short work of the Infernal Council, a battle where each player fights their own mini-boss.

Unfortunately, Red 5 weren't able to crack Soa, the final encounter of the Eternity Vault. They managed to get him below 10% health, but bugs with de-spawning bosses and broken floating platforms intervened.

If you'd like to get involved with our *TOR* guild or join the raiding scene, check out *bit.ly/pcgswtor*. ■

"Oh no, I've been stabbed. 1,291 times."

In every family photo, someone's looking away...

...but not all of them have a giant broken robot.

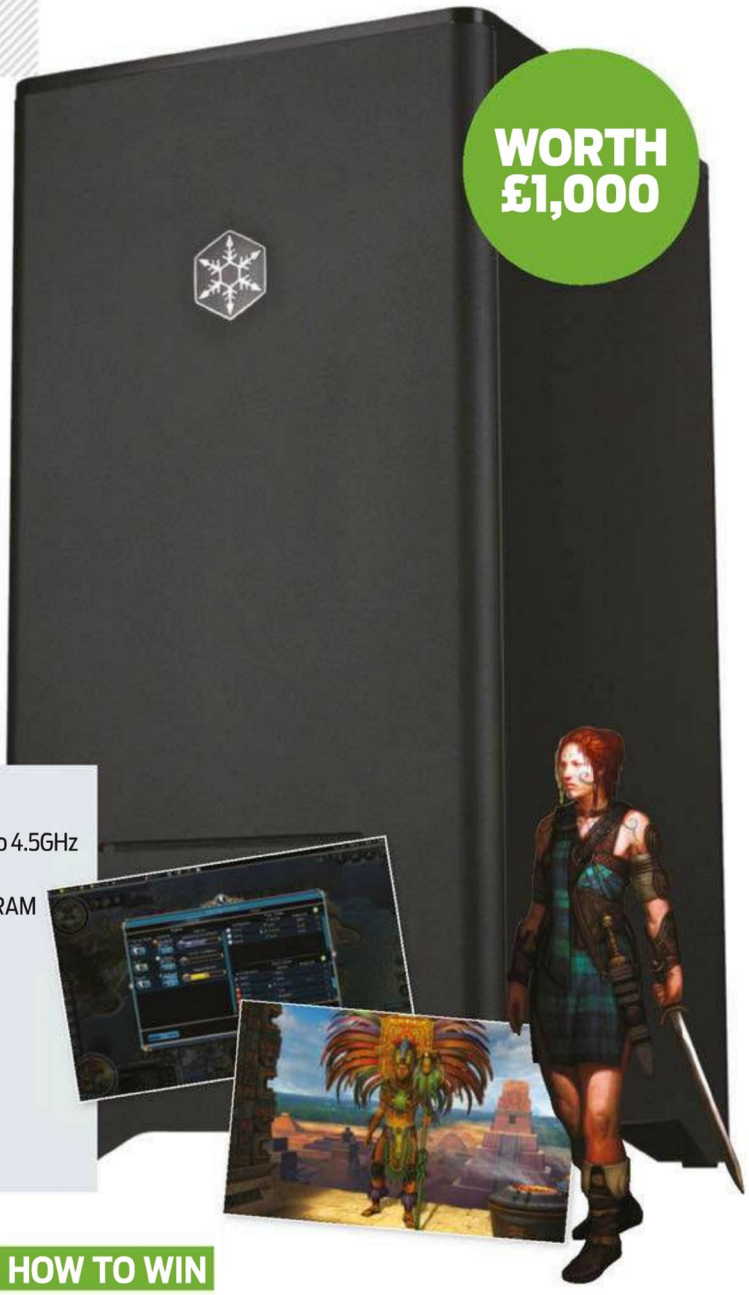
NOW PLAYING

EVE Corp: PCG Enterprises
Forum: bit.ly/pcgeve
■ Our powerful *EVE* corporation is on the lookout for new pilots. If boundless space adventure appeals to you, but you're put off by the steep learning curve, then ask to speak to a PCG Enterprises officer in-game. Or, check out the forum for tips, guides, and instructions for applying for membership. We're always running production projects for players of an industrial persuasion, so you'll be contributing to the ongoing effort before you know it.

World of Warcraft
Guild name: PCG
Server: Steamwheedle Cartel
Forum: bit.ly/pcgwowguild
■ Veteran raiders from our *WoW* guild have now conquered arch-baddie Deathwing and are awaiting the next challenge that Blizzard have in store. It's the perfect time to get involved – if you fancy yourself as a future dragon-slayer, type '/who PCG' in-game and ask to speak to an officer. You can also register your interest on our forum. Friendly players are always available to help you see everything *WoW* has to offer.

Battlefield 3
Server: bit.ly/pcgbf3
■ Our 64-player server plays host to the biggest skirmishes that *Battlefield 3* supports. The population has been dipping during the day lately, so feel free to pitch in on the evenings or weekends to get your fill of massive tank-on-tank-on-man-on-jet action. DICE are committed to tweaking and improving the game, which will hopefully iron out the stability problems some of us have been having and rebalance weapons and unlocks to add more interesting loadout decisions.

WIN!



A praise-worthy PC

2K's turn-based magnum opus, *Civilization V*, is set to become even more, um... magnanimous, with the release of *Gods and Kings*.

This expansion will add 27 new units, nine new leaders – including Boudicca and the Prince of Orange – new wonders, buildings, scenarios, and resources. Also two new city-state types, mercantile and religious, which will have a big effect on diplomatic victories.

Pursue the pious route, and you can found a new religion and choose a set of beliefs that will give bonuses to the civs that adopt your exciting new way of thinking. Religion is spread by geographical proximity – a bit like plague – and can be expanded with new missionary units who will grant further stat-boosts along with tactical benefits. These changes will be highlighted by new scenarios, including the fall of the Roman empire and a steampunk Victorian science-fiction setting with a new tech tree and new units.

To celebrate *Gods and Kings*, 2K have the splendid PC pictured here to give away. For a chance to win it, we're asking you to prepare the way for this expansion by founding the PC Gamer religion. See below.

THE PRIZE

- Intel Core i7 2600K overclocked to 4.5GHz
- Asus P8Z68-V LX B3
- Kingston 4 x2GB DDR3 1333MHz RAM
- HDD 1TB F3
- 24X DVD+-RW
- NZXT Sentry LX fan control
- VGA GTX 560 1GB graphics card
- Cooler Master HAF 912 case
- Asetek water cooling
- Cyberpower 800watt PSU
- Windows 7 home 64

Name

Address

Postcode

Email

Phone Number

Send your competition entry and this form to: 'The PC Gamer Delusion' competition, PC Gamer, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW. The closing date for this competition is May 9, 2012.

Your contact details from this entry form will only be used for contacting you if you are a winner. For terms and conditions applying to PC Gamer competitions, point your eyes at the small print leftwards.

HOW TO WIN

Objects of worship

We want you to prove your devotion to PC Gamer by founding a religion in our name. Create a shrine to PCG and send us a picture of you worshipping in front of it, along with your plan to indoctrinate more followers. Only the most dedicated disciple will win the PC.

COMPETITION RULES By taking part in a Competition, you agree to be bound by the Competition Rules which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at www.futurenet.com/futureonline/competitionrules.asp. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Competition is open to all GB residents of 18 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a Competition you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the Company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that the Competition entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.

PRIZE DRAW RULES By taking part in a Prize Draw, you agree to be bound by the Prize Draw Rules which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at survey.futurenet.com/prizedrawtandcs2007. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The winner(s) will be selected at random after the specified closing date. Winner(s) will be notified by email or telephone within 28 days of the closing date. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Prize Draw is open to all GB residents of 16 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a Prize Draw you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Prize Draw and for promotional purposes. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Prize Draw Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.

WON!

The winner of PCG 236's 'Artefact or fiction' competition

Interniana Jones squats in the post room, hands a few inches above Phil Harris's glittering Skull of Valour. A single bead of sweat drops to the pile of crumpled envelopes at his feet. "Competition entries," he thinks. "Why does it always have to be competition entries?"

And what were PC Gamer thinking, asking their readers to build 'an artefact' in honour of *Warlock: Master of the Arcane*? Jones withdraws from his bag an item of approximately equal size and weight. It's an enchanted scroll by Bill Brind, stretched between two ornate wooden rollers and inscribed in elegant binary.

Jones swaps scroll for skull and runs, pursued by a huge ball of collector's edition statuettes. Diving under a closing door, he reaches back to retrieve his exclusive PC Gamer *Team Fortress 2* hat, and is crushed to death.

WHAT PHIL WON...

- Lan Party Evo Commander
- Silverstone Fortress FT03B
- Intel Core i5 2500K
- GTX 560Ti 1GB
- MS Windows 7 Home Premium 64 bit
- 8GB 1600MHz RAM
- Asus Maximus IV Gene-z
- 2TB SATA II HDD
- 32GB SSD in SRT Mode
- Codes for all of Paradox's games on Steam

The winning entry

'The Skull of Valour' *by Phil Harris*

The priceless runner-up

'+2 scroll of computer insight', by Bill Brind.

PC GAMER GAMING ESSENTIALS

CONTACT To advertise on these pages email **gamingessentials@futurenet.com**

INSERT COIN CLOTHING

INSERT COIN
WWW.INSERTCOINCLOTHING.COM

Get Your Geek on for Less! Want to level up your wardrobe even quicker? Simply become a member of Insert Coin!

When you buy any tees or hoodies online you can start saving coins to use against your next purchases. You can even get a free tee once you hit the 100 coin target!

NEW RANGE NOW AVAILABLE!

And, as a member, you'll get access to the latest designs and exclusive news and competitions.

So, what are you waiting for? Sign-up today and get your geek on for less...

€2.00 GIFT VOUCHER CODE: FUTURE11

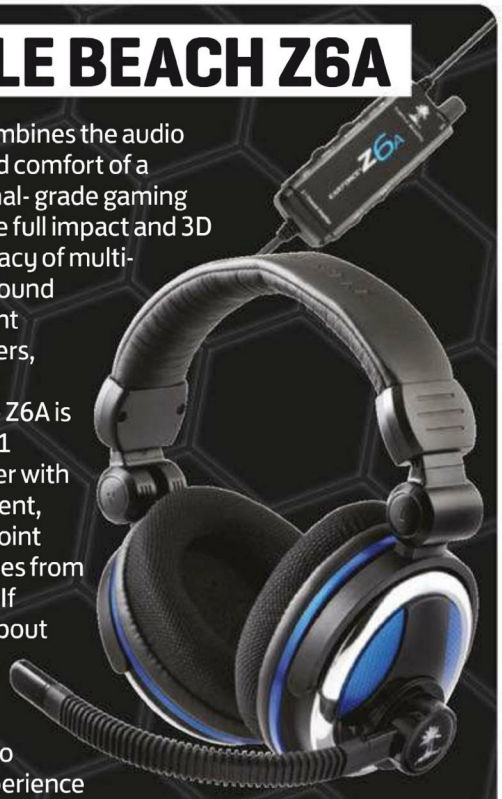
'Officially our favourite brand of videogame-inspired tees.' Edge magazine

'The only gaming gear I'm proud to wear to the pub.' Graeme Boyd, Xbox

FREE UK DELIVERY!

TURTLE BEACH Z6A

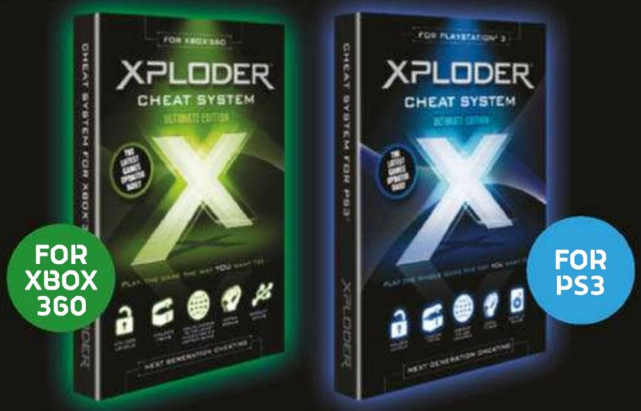
The Z6A combines the audio quality and comfort of a professional- grade gaming headset with the full impact and 3D positional accuracy of multi-speaker 5.1 surround sound. With eight premium speakers, including dual subwoofers, the Z6A is powered by a 5.1 channel amplifier with bass enhancement, letting you pinpoint critical sound cues from every direction. If you're serious about gaming, then get serious about the sound. Step up to the Z6A and experience game audio like never before.



www.lygoworld.com

XPLODER CHEAT SYSTEM

The latest cheats for the latest games



FOR XBOX 360

FOR PS3

Unlock Levels | Unlock Items | Instant Online Updates | Extra Power | Back Up Saves

Get the digital download version from xploder.net

amazon.co.uk play.com zavvi.com thehut and all good independent retailers

This product is not endorsed by Sony or Microsoft

REVIEWS

How we review

Wherever possible, we finish every game before finalising the review. We review each game on its own merits, and try to match it to a reviewer who's a passionate expert in the field. The main aim of the reviews section is to help you make buying decisions. As such, we'll review paid-for content of all types in addition to the latest big-name releases.

Our scoring system explained

0-30% Intolerable
A crime against gaming. Whether it's bugs or bad design, this should be shot on sight.

31-45% Weak
Serious flaws ruin any chance this game has of offering sustained fun.

46-60% Mediocre
A very ordinary game, quickly forgotten. Think twice even if you find it cheap.

61-75% Fair
A decent effort that, but for a little more polish, coulda been a contender.

76-89% Good
Enjoyable, well-made and entertaining – just falling short of true greatness.

90%+ Editor's Choice
Oozing class, this is the work of experts at the top of their game. Bravo, sirs!

PC GAMER EDITOR'S CHOICE ★★★★★

A game scoring 90% or more is the proud recipient of a PC Gamer Editor's Choice award. The Editor's personal seal of approval means we think the recipient is a truly great example of its genre.

THE PC GAMER MACHINES

We aim to review games at their best, and this means playing them on our two Cyberpower PCs. The Gamer Infinity i7 Pro boasts a Core i7 920 CPU, 3GB DDR3 RAM and a GTS250 graphics card. Coming from the AMD angle, our watercooled Gamer Ultra Perseus machine has a Phenom II CPU, 4GB DDR3 RAM and an HD 4870 card. Powerful machines both, but we also test new games on lower-spec machines, and we'll tell you if a game will make unreasonable demands. Go to *www.cyberpowersystem.co.uk* for more info on our top-spec machines.

CYBERPOWER

Time will tell

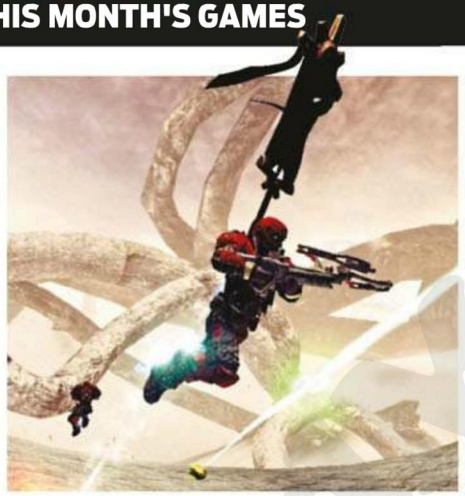
Usually we're only too happy to give you our verdict on a game when everyone agrees it's finished, but Hi-Rez's high-speed *Tribes: Ascend* broke the mould by accepting player cash in the form of microtransactions during its beta. We're committed to providing the best buying advice for PC Gamer readers, and if you can throw your hard-earned pennies at a game, it's time for us to tell you if it's any cop, regardless of a developer's proclamations. We made the decision to review the game this month. Turn over and you'll see *Tribes: Ascend* is a *lot* of cop.

Hi-Rez's game might change in the future. If so, we pledge to revisit it as we've done with *League of Legends* this month. Riot's MOBA has grown, so we've reviewed it again.

RICH MCCORMICK
NEWS EDITOR
Richard.McCormick@futurenet.com

Let us know what you think
Get in touch via our 'Send' section on page 70 or via our forum at *www.pcgamer.com/forum*

THIS MONTH'S GAMES



Tribes: Ascend 80
PixelJunk Eden 86
Mortal Kombat Kollection 87
Starpoint Gemini 87
Wakfu 88
MUD FIM Motocross World Championship 90
Rayman Origins 92
Realm of the Mad God 94
Mass Effect 3 96
MS Flight 102
Vessel 104
Snuggle Truck 105
Titan Attacks! 105
League of Legends 106
Victoria II: A House Divided 110
J.U.L.I.A. 111
Really Big Sky 111
1000 Amps 112
Crazy Machines Elements 113
Scoregasm 113
THEY'RE BACK 114

WorldMags.net

"It's a minor miracle that they've preserved so much of what made *Tribes* special"

Need to know

What is it?
A fluid, free-to-play sci-fi multiplayer FPS.

Influenced by
Tribes 2

Play it on
2.4GHz quad-core processor, 4GB RAM, GeForce 580/ Radeon AMD 5870

Alternatively
Team Fortress 2

Copy protection
Online login

WorldMags.net

FLYING HIGH

Revamped for a new generation of PCs, **TRIBES: ASCEND** is free, fast, and faithful to itself. ***By Evan Lahti***

Wonderful, breath-clutching games of chicken happen along the z-axis in *Tribes: Ascend*.

You're hovering, the guy you want to kill is hovering, and you each have a few sips of battery juice left in your jetpack. Gravity is death: drop first, and you become an instant candidate for one of *Tribes*' splash-damage weapons: a grenade, Spinfusor disc, or gamma-ray-green mortar shell.

In these shared seconds of airtime, your brain crunches weapon trajectory paths, shot velocity, topography and damage radii – and there's a layer of deception happening atop that. Maybe I'll feint a fall, then right-click to lift at the last second. Maybe he'll whip out his secondary weapon to harass me out of the air with pistol shots. Maybe I'll put a grenade under him to force him to spend all his flight energy.

This is a lot of good nuance. Plenty of FPS games demand finesse, but *Tribes: Ascend* is one of the few I've played that supports this mental-physical ballet (*Quake III* is another). In open beta since February, it still isn't without issues. Teamwork is suspiciously inconsistent, clan and dedicated server support are coming but not yet integrated, some weapons have a high learning curve, vehicles don't influence matches as much as I wish they did. VOIP is AWOL.

But mostly, it's a minor miracle that a young, independent studio has preserved so much of what made *Tribes* (*Tribes 2*, moreso) special, while turning it into an affordable microtransaction-supported game in a new engine.

If high speed movement is your only point of reference for *Tribes*, know that it's as easy as it has ever been. Skiing is simple: hit the spacebar when you're facing down a hill, and you'll slide frictionlessly. It's like having bowling balls for feet. You maintain any momentum until you reach an upward slope, then right-click to jetpack up another hill.

That seesaw repetition between your thumb and the right mouse button is simple work. The hard and satisfying side comes in orienting yourself in the air to a trajectory that lets you land gently and without losing any momentum. Hi-Rez's smart addition of a speedometer to *Tribes* provides welcome feedback. If I flub a landing, I can see the dent it makes in my velocity immediately.

Après ski

For learning the basics, however, I wish *Ascend*'s skiing tutorial was built in a way that provided real moment-to-moment feedback. The lone walkthrough talks you through it, but there's no dynamic, evaluative system in place to tell you if you should've jetpacked a half-second earlier or landed a bit more to the left of where you did. Right now, your best tutor is probably YouTube (*bit.ly/AjAhkD*) or loading a local server to drill by yourself.

Overall, it's damn wonderful to play an FPS that reveres movement. The entry point for skiing is relatively low for anyone who plays shooters, but the skill ceiling is appropriately high. Masters of fast-movement throw explosives at their own feet to achieve maximum momentum. Expert flag-runners figure out clever routes. It all lends *Tribes* an aspirational quality I love: when you see someone moving fluidly, you want to get better.

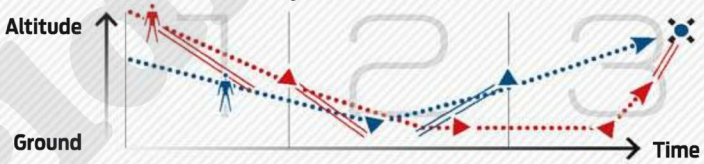
But movement isn't the only fun thing to do on *Tribes*' busty topography, thank goodness. *Ascend* is the first time *Tribes* has had classes, and I don't think their addition hampers the joy of finding a job on the battlefield and making it yours.

Sometimes I dedicate an entire round just to bringing down the enemy's generator, which powers their turrets, inventory stations and sensors. Even if I die a lot, I'm happy knowing I'm holding the attention of three or four enemies in the process. When I'm a Technician, I'm a base bee. I hum around our HQ's infrastructure and make sure our own generator and turrets are intact.

Sometimes I focus on taking speed away from enemies in the midfield. I try to be a bipedal deterrent – I fill skiing lines with chaingun munition and throw flag-runners off their stride. A more direct – and entirely viable – job is playing a Juggernaut ▸

Mental math

The frontal lobe wizardry of ten seconds of *Tribes* combat



1. Spot enemy 50 meters away, low health. He doesn't see me. Fire a Spinfusor a few meters ahead of him.
Brain activity: scanning, timing, leading.

2. He reaccelerates up a hill, gets airborne, and turns to fire at me.
Brain activity: scan landscape for highest/lowest points, escape routes.

3. He's down to a sliver of health. My Eagle pistol touches him twice in 12 shots, and he drops like an armoured fly.
Brain activity: concentration, hand-eye coordination.

WorldMags.net

"Through no will of my own, it connected. He died"

with the Super Heavy perk, standing right on the flag to block banner thieves. It's wonderful that players who don't want to be athletic still have a dozen ways to be heroes.

Sometimes I'm a harasser, counter-sniper, midfield mortarer. And I can migrate between these positions depending on map and mood. With role variety as a strength, though, it's puzzling that *Tribes*' incentives for teamwork are so thin. Kill assists and flag passing are the only game mechanics in place that directly encourage players to work together. It's frustrating when a public match occasionally devolves into a bunch of individuals doing their own thing.

That wouldn't be so damning if voice communication wasn't still waiting to be patched in. The voice hotkey system is handy (tap 'VDG' to broadcast "Defend our generator!"), but provides no room for real strategic planning. This is a serious teamwork sapper.

This is less apparent in team deathmatch, which operates really well as a break from the labour of base- and flag-guarding. It's more mindless than CTF: a swirling hive of players spend lives from a shared pool of a hundred per team. Few roles other than the Soldier and Pathfinder are currently used, meaning it's mostly a game of spinfusors, and there's actually a single flag in this mode: carrying it makes your team's kills worth double. I like the circular shape of these maps a lot – a NASCAR-like train of players tends to form behind the flag carrier, jousting and trading fire. It's a great sight.

Cost of living

The free-to-play model is pretty fair, as these things go. Pricing is tiered: spending more gets you proportionately more in-game currency. For £31, you get 5,500 gold, or 110 gold/dollar. For £12, you get 1,800 gold, or 90 gold/dollar. At current pricing, £19 (3,000 gold) will give most players more than enough to try every class and specialise in two or three. The six paid classes (everyone gets the Pathfinder, Soldier, and Juggernaut for free) cost between 160 and 280 gold each. All six is 1,360 gold, or about £8.

That's totally reasonable – the barrier to finding your favourite class is low. Owning more classes opens more gateways to player purchasing of weapons, perks, skins and equipment, most of which cost more. The most expensive weapons are about £5, and that includes highly attractive guns such as the MIRV (a cluster-mortar that fires a shell that splits in mid-air) and the Thumper grenade launcher.

Money lets you buy stuff and provides larger amounts of XP after each match, but skill still absolutely overrides those boons. At the time of writing, all weapons, items and perks can also be purchased with that freely earned XP. Most importantly, the payment model doesn't replace the need to master *Tribes*' weapons and movement. You still have to aim where enemies will be, not where they are.

The great feedback the guns give facilitates this. Nearly all project their firing path and velocity, either with a tracer or a coloured comet tail. Admiring a shot that you know will connect as it travels in mid-air is the other benefit here.

My gripes don't end with the sparse teamwork, however. Base interiors are simplistic. The five-on-five arena mode (tight, tiny ledges floating in the sky) bores and frustrates me compared to CTF because the maps are rigid in a way that makes skiing impossible. I also don't like how ancillary vehicles are to victory; they're an expensive way of attracting attention to yourself and getting killed. The most useful – an air fighter called the Shrike – is just a pricey mosquito in the hands of anyone other than a pro pilot.

Little of this, however, gets in the way of the primal, potent feelings of chasing and being chased.

There's a thing that happens in the middle of most maps. Players from opposite teams pass at high speed en route to each other's base. Usually, you're going too fast to even bother attacking – you each silently tip your hat and hope the other guy gets annihilated by your teammates. One time as this happened and we blazed past each other, my brain reflexively told my hands to left-click, and I flicked a Spinfusor disc over my shoulder. Through no will of my own, it connected. He died, and I slid on unmolested, yelling only the word "WHAT" over and over at my monitor. This Venn overlap of intuition and speed is where *Tribes*' magic takes place, and it produces an insane hole-in-one shot for you every match or two. ■

Role call

A breakdown of every class

LIGHT

Pathfinder
Best weapons bolt launcher, shotgun
Good for flag grabbing, fast pursuit
Difficulty 4/10
Comparable to *TF2*'s Scout

Sentinel
Best weapons BXT1 rifle, claymores
Good for harassment, stopping flag carriers
Difficulty 5/10
Comparable to AWP junkies in *Counter-Strike*

Infiltrator
Best weapons stealth spinfusor, stealth pack
Good for base infiltration, killing Sentinels
Difficulty 7/10
Comparable to the Predator

Pathfinder

MEDIUM

Soldier
Best weapons spinfusor, thumper DX
Good for versatility, pursuit
Difficulty 3/10
Comparable to Rambo

Technician
Best weapons TCN4 SMG, light turret
Good for base defence, turret and generator repair
Difficulty 7/10
Comparable to *TF2*'s Engineer

Raider
Best weapons Arx buster, shield pack
Good for structure and vehicle assassination
Difficulty 4/10
Comparable to *TF2*'s Demoman

Raider

HEAVY

Juggernaut
Best weapons fusion mortar, spinfusor MKD
Good for base defence, area-denial artillery
Difficulty 8/10
Comparable to *Quake III*'s grenade launcher

Doombringer
Best weapons chaingun, force field
Good for on-flag defence, flag blocking
Difficulty 6/10
Comparable to A bouncer

Brute
Best weapons heavy spinfusor, fractal grenade
Good for base assault
Difficulty 5/10
Comparable to a Krogan warrior

Brute

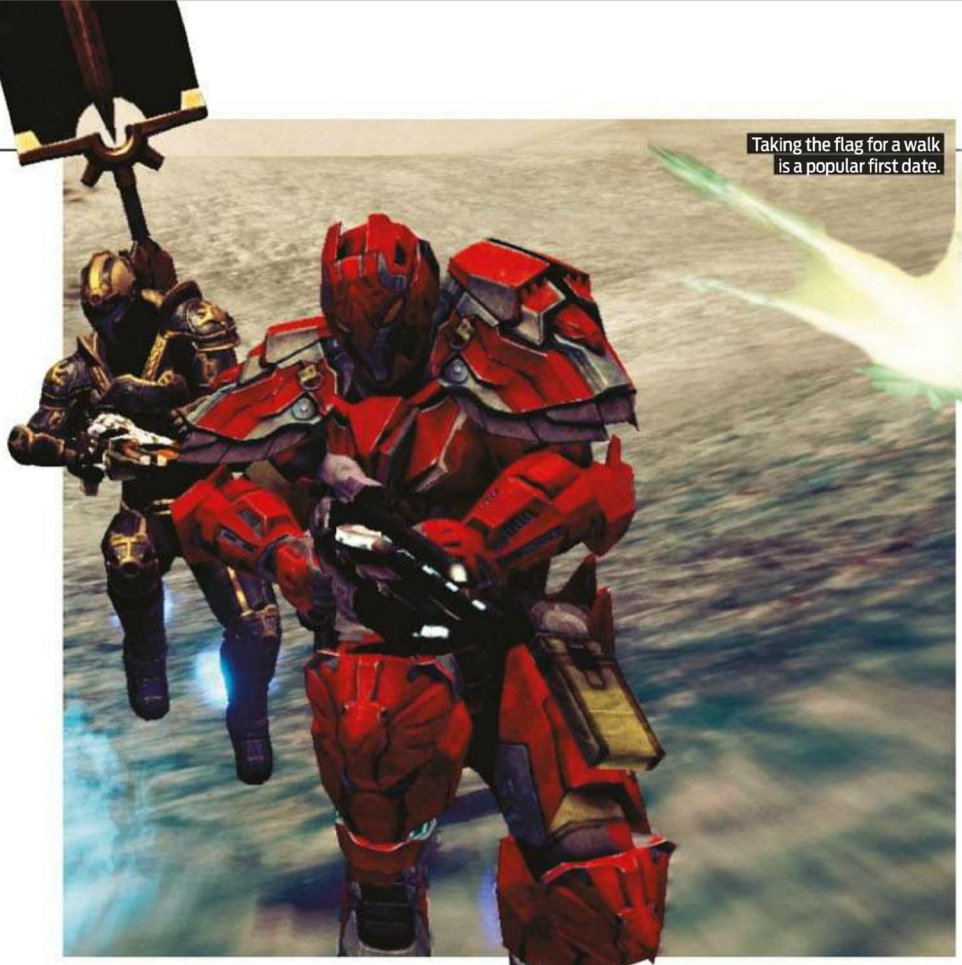
◆ **Expect to pay** Free ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Hi-Rez Studios ◆ **Developer** In-house
◆ **Multiplayer** Up to 32 players ◆ **Link** bit.ly/vkXShF

VERDICT

A brilliant resurrection of a classic. Speed and skill-driven mechanics separate Tribes from other modern shooters.

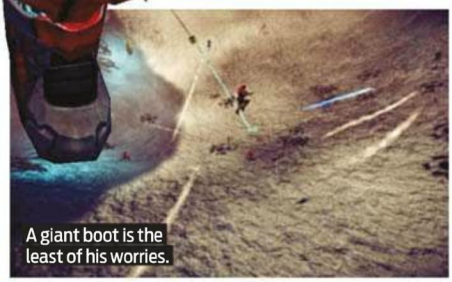
PC GAMER **88**

WorldMags.net


Taking the flag for a walk is a popular first date.

There are few traditional firearms.

The 'future litter picker' is not a popular class.


A giant boot is the least of his worries.

Team Deathmatch is a change of pace...

...but CTF is the main event. We have flags. Flags flags flags.

Mortars aren't ideal against airborne targets.

Another ski trip ends in tragedy.

To get a successful capture, stay on your toes.

WorldMags.net

SUBSCRIBE TO PC GAMER DIGITALLY http://goo.gl/SfZON

Your favourite magazine. Available on Apple Newsstand

Available on iPad and iPhone.

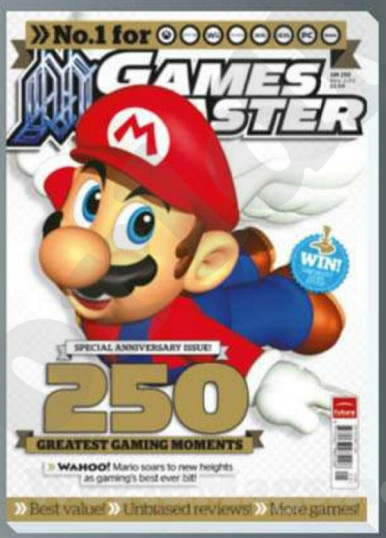
You can now buy a digital edition of PC Gamer, ready to read whenever you want. Both single issues and subscriptions are available and each purchase is permanently stored in your own magazine library forever.

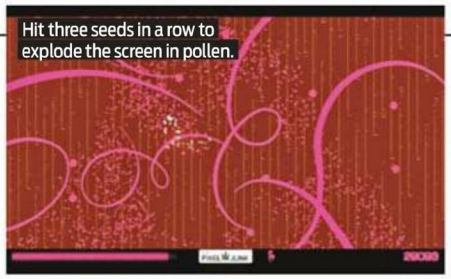
To buy your digital copy of PC Gamer visit
http://goo.gl/SfZON

Once the magazine has downloaded an internet connection is not required.

WorldMags.net

More great mags available here
myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/zinio





BLOOMING GREAT

The higher the pollen count the better, in the gardens of **PIXELJUNK EDEN**. ***By Phil Savage***

Need to know

What is it?
An arty platformer about gardening. Sort of.

Influenced by
Water thrown in a parking lot. No, really.

Play it on
Core 2 Duo CPU, 512MB RAM, 300MB HDD

Alternatively
Eufloria

Copy protection
Steam

You might be tempted to dismiss the port of a downloadable PlayStation 3 2D platform game originally released in 2008. Here are some reasons why you shouldn't: it's the most interesting of the *PixelJunk* series; the PC release is the definitive version, fixing a number of problems from the original; and it has the most enjoyable level-select screen of any game I can think of – a sort of growing floral jungle gym to play in.

Your aim is to collect Spectra, five of which are hidden around each level (or Garden, as the game insists on calling them). Doing this requires jumping around, bursting Pollen Prowlers and collecting the pollen they drop. This fills 'seeds', which sprout into flowers which form a path you can climb, reaching towards your goal.

Helping you achieve this is the silk thread, which you can use to dangle off a flower, rotating to catch Pollen Prowlers in your makeshift net. The more you hit, the more pollen they'll drop, but spin for too long and your thread will snap, potentially sending you falling back down to the beginning of the level.

It's this risk versus reward system that *Eden* constantly utilises to keep you involved. For instance, should you fall, you can warp back to the flower you last gripped. The cost is that you lose a chunk off your 'oscillator' – a timer that constantly ticks down, kicking you out of the level unless you can find crystals to refill it.

None of which would work if the controls weren't up to the task of dealing with the various tricky leaps you're required to pull off. Fortunately it's here that Q-Games have made the most of the conversion to PC. Click the right mouse button and your creature jumps in the direction of the cursor; hold the button down and he'll follow it in mid-air. The degree of fine-tuning and accuracy available easily outperforms the original control-pad setup.

Another reason to pay attention to *Eden* is that it's absolutely gorgeous. The screenshots give you an idea of the stark minimalism – foregrounds almost in silhouette against vibrant backdrops. But what they don't capture is the sheer liquidity of the movement. New flowers pour into existence, swaying gently back and forth while the background pulsates to the ambient soundtrack.

Each of the 15 gardens (ten in the main game, with a further five in the bundled *Encore* DLC) has a distinctive personality, reflected both in its visual design and its central challenge. Some of these are downright fiendish, most notably Garden 7's shifting gravity, which always seems to change as you're reaching a Spectra you've spent time working towards.

Despite this, you should unlock all levels in a few hours without feeling tested. As a game, there's not a lot of challenge to *Eden*. As an experience, it's well worth spending time with. ■

◆ **Expect to pay** £7 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Q-Games ◆ **Developer** In-house
◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** bit.ly/xpkGeY

VERDICT

Enjoyable to play with, satisfying controls and a variety of other tweaks. This is a console port made good.

PC GAMER **84**

WorldMags.net

KOMPROMISED

MORTAL KOMBAT KOLLECTION fails to show us any new moves. ***By Chris Thursten***

I'm not a violent person, but Games for Windows Live makes me want to punch someone hard in the kidneys. Its presence in the *Mortal Kombat Kollection* is clearly a stroke of genius: what better way to turn a mild-mannered writer into a spine-rending monster? I can't play *Mortal Kombat* until I've updated Live, which means I need to quit the game. I can't quit the game unless I can access the main menu, which I can't do without updating Live. If I Alt-F4 out, the update fails. It's got me on the ropes. "FINISH HIM!" a voice cries. "KAFKALITY!"

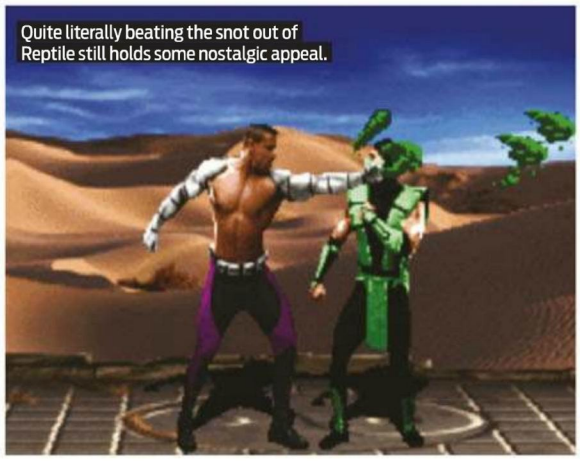
A visit to the Steam forums and a long-winded solution later, here's what you get: faithful recreations of the first three *Mortal Kombat* games, including *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* and its bonus characters. It's a port of the Xbox Live Arcade/PSN collection from last year, but nothing to do with the console remake from last April. This is a strictly retro affair, albeit with online multiplayer.

It's not a great port, either. The resolution is locked at console defaults, so give up on your dream of seeing the games in full-screen HD. Little has been added, the chief new features being a moves list and the ability to overlay a range of pointless graphical filters to mask the series' ageing digitised sprites. The first few *Mortal Kombat* games remain as difficult as ever: if you're a big enough fan then you know what you're up against, but everyone else should be prepared for a rough ride.

Mortal Kombat Kollection is a serviceable compilation wrapped in a dodgy console conversion. Sheer bull-headedness will see the most dedicated through, but for the rest of us, it's not worth it. ■

PC GAMER **40**

'Poster paint' is one of several entirely superfluous graphical filters on offer.


Quite literally beating the snot out of Reptile still holds some nostalgic appeal.

◆ **Expect to pay** £6.99 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Warner Bros ◆ **Developer** Other Ocean Entertainment ◆ **Multiplayer** Up to 2 players ◆ **Link** bit.ly/mkkollection

ASTRONOUGHT

STARPOINT GEMINI should be thrown out of the airlock. ***By Julian Benson***

Placing you in the cockpit of a starship and leaving you to explore the galaxy in the way you wish is a compelling concept. Unfortunately, *Starpoint Gemini* falls far short of its promise. Unstable and empty, the game is unfit for release. Problems appear early: starting a new game is a matter of chance, sometimes crashing, other times getting caught in an infinite load, and occasionally actually booting.

If you do manage to get the thing running, you are treated to a tedious hour-long tutorial on the game's systems. However, vital information is either hidden or nonexistent. Ship hardpoints, the spaces in which you can install shields and weapons, aren't visible when buying a vessel: you could spend hours earning credits only to waste them on a ship which is less advanced than the one you already own.

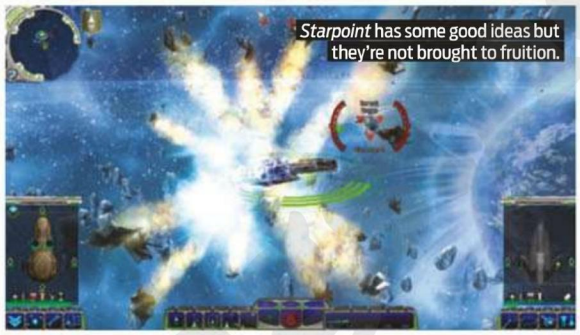
It's combat that really suffers from the opaque design. Despite being able to scan enemy ships, it's virtually impossible to distinguish whether it's a heavily armed warship or a mining vessel. Some enemies will destroy you in a couple of hits, others will barely scratch your shields.

The interface is full of unintuitive niggles: pressing ESC to bring up the menu screen but not to close it; an expanded minimap that fills the screen while flying and becomes uncloseable if you had it open before docking at a spacestation.

Then there are the game-breaking bugs. Twice mission objectives didn't spawn, leaving me unable to continue the main storyline. Another playthough was thwarted by an autosave moments before my ship exploded.

Unfinished, unpolished, and not worth £15. ■

PC GAMER **18**


Starpoint has some good ideas but they're not brought to fruition.

For all your ability to scan enemies, that could a Renault Clio.

◆ **Expect to pay** £14.99 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Iceberg Interactive ◆ **Developer** Little Green Man ◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** www.starpointgemini.com

WorldMags.net

PRETTY THE FOO

WAKFU presses your nose firmly against the grindstone. ***By Richard Cobbett***

Need to know

What is it?
An MMO where you help maintain the ecosystem as well as beat stuff up.

Influenced by
Maple Story

Play it on
2GHz CPU, 2GB RAM, 512MB 3D card

Alternatively
Second Life, 84%

Copy protection
Online

Mommy, where do monsters come from? In many of *Wakfu*'s gorgeous areas, they're provided by other players.

If you casually amble over and kill one for the experience points, as you would in the average MMO, it's gone for good. Or at least until the survivors get a chance to reproduce, or someone else swings by to grow a replacement. *Wakfu* loves this kind of thing. It's an MMO where players control the economy, ecosystem and politics of the world – a world that tries to rope everyone from huge guilds to individual players into playing a part in something bigger than their own story. It's friendlier than *EVE Online*. It's more of a sandbox than *World of Warcraft*.

Unfortunately, it's also so relentlessly grindy, it should come with a mortar and pestle.

"Players control the economy, ecosystem and politics"

At first, things are cheery enough. *Wakfu* has one of the most beautiful 2D worlds around, and its flooded landscapes drip with endearing French quirkiness. Character classes have names such as 'Enutrof's Fingers' and 'Pandawa's Pint', and all of them are so cute, they practically beg you to reach in and give them a cuddle. In game, it's like wandering around an MMO version of *Bastion*, with beautiful vistas and tongue-in-cheek humour throughout. It's a world you want to explore.

The combat starts out equally refreshing. Instead of standard hack and slash blow-trading, fights are reminiscent of *Final Fantasy Tactics*. Viewed from an isometric viewpoint, each character takes it in turn to move and use their abilities, fighting on a combat grid temporarily cut out of the rest of the world to let you wage war in peace. The action is kept at a reasonably fast pace by offering bonuses for speedy play, and each character class has plenty of skills. It gives you options, if not as many as in games that give you a whole team to control.

Free to pay

Unfortunately, this is where *Wakfu* first sabotages itself. While it looks like – and arguably should be – free to play (it already double-dips with an item store), it's actually subscription based, at £5 a month. If you don't pay, you're limited to the first two areas and cut off from most of the game's features – and that's fine. Less understandable is that subscribers and non-subscribers can't group together, even in shared areas. This is madness, encouraging players to go it alone in the all-important early bits where you should be making friends and getting used to teaming up.

Grouped or not, the appeal of the main game soon wears off. Technically, *Wakfu* offers plenty to do. In practice, it feels very empty.

There aren't many quests in the traditional sense, for a start. In the tutorial area, the floating island of Incarnum, progress is very structured, and there's a hint of more dramatic stuff to come on the evil Mt Zinit. Once in the main world though, the focus largely switches to more general Achievements and tirelessly grinding away on the same enemies for hour after hour.

That's not simply to boost your character level, either, but also the crafting disciplines you'll need to make any money in the world, and even individual attacks. That there's a more interesting metagame of politics and balancing ecosystems on offer quickly gets buried under all this, especially as everything is so poorly explained that you need a wiki on standby to get a grip on many of the absolute basics.

As grinds go, *Wakfu* is at least a pretty one – and innovative in many ways, with plenty of potential. You do have to make your own fun though, so look elsewhere if you're not going to get into the political side, or simply aren't a social enough butterfly to avoid going it solo. ■

By the numbers

Wakfu's combat is turn-based and orderly. It goes like this:

1. Launch attack
Most enemies don't initiate combat.

2. Placement phase
Not many options, but choose carefully.

3. Initiative roll
Hope you go first – it's a big advantage.

4. Player turn
Use it in 30 seconds or lose it.

5. Enemy turns
Ow. Even low-levellers hit hard.

6. Repeat
...from 4 until one of you falls.

7. Repeat
...from 1 until dead or level 200.

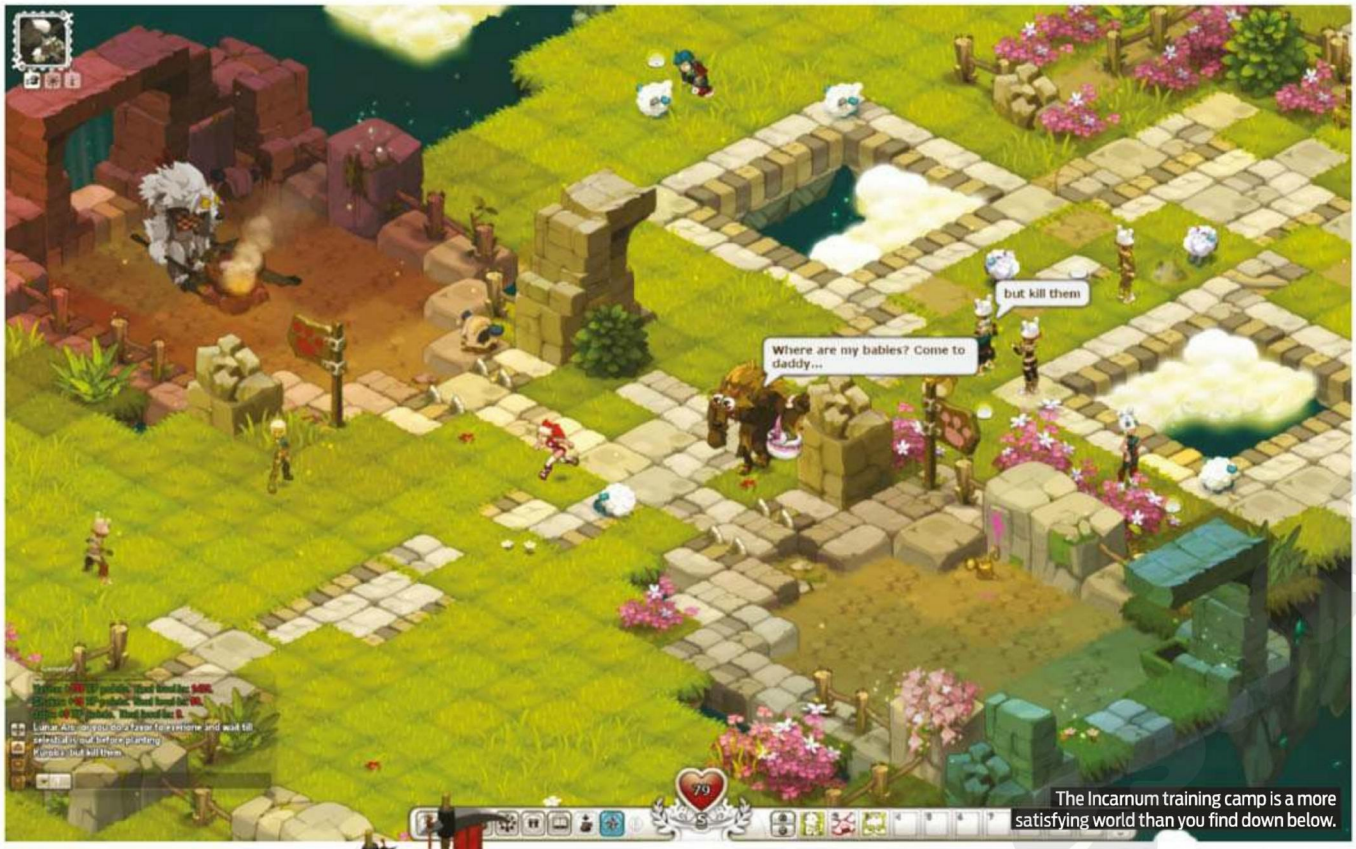
◆ **Expect to pay** £5/month ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Ankama ◆ **Developer** In-house ◆ **Multiplayer** Massively ◆ **Link** www.wakfu.com

VERDICT

A beautiful alternative to the standard MMO, but unlikely to draw you away from more structured questing for long.

PC GAMER **58**

WorldMags.net



WorldMags.net

Successful scrubs give you the boost needed to catch other riders.

Construction site? No, it's the perfect terrain for lunatics.

Terrain deformation can become extreme in later laps.

Somehow Motocross has avoided Health & Safety advisors.

MO' SCRUBS

Less distractions, just let me race in the MUD – FIM MOTOCROSS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP. *By Phil Savage*

Need to know

What is it?
Bike racer featuring Motocross and caffeine-based energy drinks.

Influenced by
SBK, FIM World Championship

Play it on
Core 2 Duo, 4GB RAM, 512MB videocard

Alternatively
Pure, 82%

Copy protection
TBC

The roar of the engines, the kick of your tail-end, the jostling for position. *MUD* may lean (mid-air, foot outstretched) towards the accessible end of the racing spectrum, but its initial races do a great job of selling the excitement of a Motocross event.

Bikes slide round corners and sluice through the dirt. They leave trails that harden and becoming hazards on later laps. Each track – recreated versions of the FIM Motocross World Championship calendar – is full of mounds and jumps, long downward slopes and technical chicanes. There is an undercurrent of realism despite the ridiculous use of energy drinks to provide temporary speed boosts.

Equally ridiculous (although actually real) is *MUD*'s primary race mechanic: the scrub. Scrubbing over a jump causes your rider to contort the bike into an improbable angle in the air. Straighten out at just the right moment and you're rewarded with a kick of speed on landing.

Mess up the timing and rider and bike will collapse to the ground. In races where riders are so tightly bunched together, it can mean the difference between competing for the front and languishing at the back. It's a trick extended out to absurdity, with races often hinging on mastering the technique, but stringing together a series of perfect jumps is a satisfying experience.

The official mode offers a quick race or a 12-track championship, letting you choose riders and teams from the tournament. But that's just the sideshow; *MUD*'s main focus is the World Tour career. Here you pick a 'Hero' and compete in a variety of events for money.

That money unlocks *everything*. You'll need to buy passes to events, and to the individual races within them, new teams that offer bigger bonuses for better finishing positions, new characters, along with character traits that boost key stats such as speed, agility and stability-boosting strength. *Then* there's helmets, new tricks for the Trick Battle mode and better energy drinks to increase boost duration. Even if you focus on unlocking new events, the rewards for completing races just aren't big enough to keep up steady progress – you'll be spending most of your time grinding for the cash to foot the mounting bills.

There are multiple event types to break up the repetition. Elimination and Checkpoint offer the standard variations, but the other, Trick Battle, just doesn't work. It feels shoehorned into an engine not designed to support the ballsy balletics of the sport, and jerky animations and unnatural trick timings lead to an uninvolving experience.

MUD just doesn't offer the technical depth to make the constant repetition of races satisfying. In an effort to add bells and whistles, it gets bogged down and struggles to maintain its initial speed. But with a dearth of bike games on the market, it still provides a few hours of thrill. ■

◆ **Expect to pay** TBC ◆ **Release** April 2012 ◆ **Publisher** Black Bean ◆ **Developer** Milestone
◆ **Multiplayer** Up to 12 ◆ **Link** mudthegame.com

VERDICT

A solid Motocross racing game that skids and falls flat on its face in the mud when it tries to be anything else.

PC GAMER **63**

WorldMags.net

ON JUNE 11 2012 WE'RE
TAKING OVER THIS TOWN.
ORANGE
AMPLIFICATION
PRESENTS
METAL HAMMER
GOLDEN GODS
2012
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
HOBGOBLIN
TO VOTE AND GET YOUR CHANCE TO WIN TICKETS, ROLL TO...
HTTP://GOLDENGODS.METALHAMMER.CO.UK/
Ave Satanas
zippo ENCORE
KRAKEN
WORLD OF TANKS
KOPPARBERG
dw.
ROADRUNNER RECORDS
Jackson
SCUZZ
DOWNLOAD

SHINING

RAYMAN ORIGINS' perfect platforming schools the competition. ***By Jon Blyth***

Need to know

What is it?
A slick Flatland platformer.

Influenced by
Rayman, Sonic, Mario

Play it on
Pentium IV 3GHz, Radeon X600XT, DirectX 9.0 sound card

Alternatively
Sonic Generations, 64%

Copy protection
None

PC GAMER EDITOR'S CHOICE ★★★★★

"Death isn't punished, and no failure feels unfair"

Having played *Rayman Origins* on the consoles, I'd already fallen in love with its colourful world. So coming to the PC version felt a bit like re-enacting a first date: a stupid but good-natured romantic fiction.

But just as we're getting ready to go to that pub where we met, so I can pretend to come over and offer the PC version of *Rayman Origins* a drink, it turns to me, and lets its dressing gown fall to the floor. I am aghast. There's just a smooth patch of skin where the DRM should be. It's never looked more beautiful.

Apart from that, this is a pixel-perfect port of an inspired and downright wonderful platformer. *Rayman* distinguishes itself and embarrasses the competition with its visual design. The creativity that flushes through every square inch of the canvas makes *Mario* feel like a stage adaptation of a washing machine manual. Moreover, *Rayman Origins* exists comfortably in its two dimensions, the only concession to the third being understated parallax. It makes the hysterical original *Sonic* levels in *Sonic Generations* feel insecure and incoherent.

Everything about the level structure makes *Rayman Origins* intuitive and joyful, and every design decision has been made to test the expert without alienating the beginner. The levels vary from familiar takes on platforming staples – cloud levels and underwater levels – to such oddities as a world based on didgeridoos. Gourmand Land takes food as its theme, effortlessly spinning snowy freezer cabinets and lava levels inside an oven.

Run and Lum

All levels are united by a deceptively simple aim: collect the small number of Electoons. Some will be in hidden areas, others won by collecting the hundreds of yellow Lums. Many of these are within easy reach, others fly out of bubbling platforms, acting as both rewards and signposts. King Lums add a touch of urgency and demand precision, doubling the value of other Lums you collect for a short time. Skull Coins are worth 25 Lums, and require the nimblest fingers and sharpest eye. To master a level, you don't have to collect every Lum, but it's so tight, you'll consider starting again if you miss one.

That's where *Rayman Origins* pulls its friendliest and most compulsive stroke. Each level is split into short checkpointed stages, allowing you to explore, forage and suicide-restart your way across a level. Death isn't punished, and apart from a rude turning circle when negotiating tight underwater levels, no failure feels unfair. You'll never *have* to return to a level later, with your new powers: everything is within grasp on the first playthrough.

The challenges vary. The bridge-crossing levels are low on hazards, but heavy on the speed-testing King Lums. The Mosquito levels transform the action into side-scrolling shoot-'em-ups, which are much more enjoyable when played on a gamepad. The optional Tricky Treasure levels are the toughest, and the only time when the game demands absolute perfection and declines to offer checkpoints. Apart from these levels, any frustration is bite-sized, manageable and deliciously compulsive. There's never a moment when you want to stop playing. With four players playing locally, it becomes enjoyably chaotic, even if the lack of online options is a bit of a lost opportunity.

Aside from a disconcertingly phallic end-of-level sequence that's as unskippable as it is frequent and overlong, everything about *Rayman*'s arrival on PC is slick and joyful. *Origins* is a rare and hefty slab of uncompromised pleasure. ■

Nymphomania

Free these nymphs, learn a new power

RUN UP WALLS!
Up walls, across ceilings
Nymph Helena Handbasket

CHANGE SIZE!
Squeeze and stretch through funnels
Nymph Edith Up

FLY!
Well, ish. It's gliding, really.
Nymph Holly Luya

DIVE!
And no oxygen meter, either
Nymph Annetta Fish

ATTACK!
Hold for a charged attack
Nymph Betilla

◆ **Expect to pay** £19.99 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Ubisoft ◆ **Developer** Ubisoft Montpellier
◆ **Multiplayer** Up to 4, local co-op ◆ **Link** raymanorigins.uk.ubi.com

VERDICT

A beautifully animated, brilliantly scored, exquisitely judged platformer, equally modern and classic.

PC GAMER 91

WorldMags.net

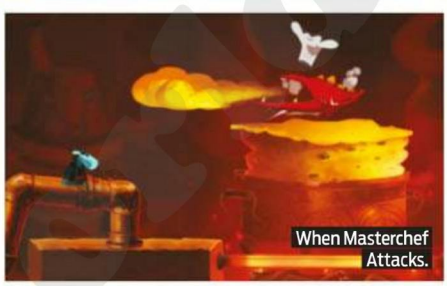
Simple but happy, Globox hangs from ledges by his top lip.

The Mosquito transforms levels into side-scrolling shooters.

Diving – the least lovely levels, but still bloody lovely.

With an oddly sexual thrust of his invisible hips, the day was saved.

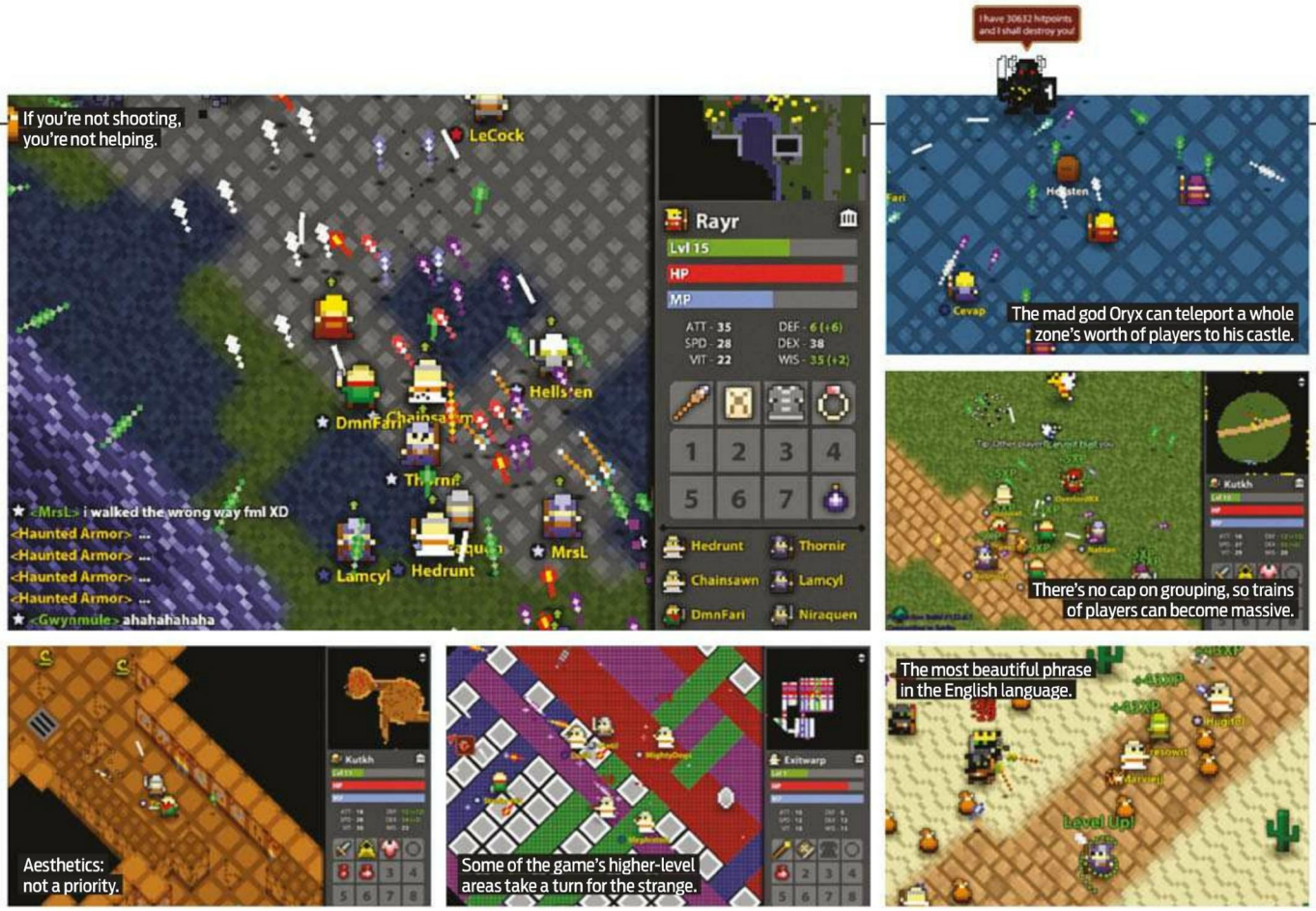
Collect this fella's teeth to access the final area.



When Masterchef Attacks.

Globox's size makes him feel more cumbersome underwater.

WorldMags.net



BEDLAM

REALM OF THE MAD GOD offers all the green numbers you can eat – but at what cost? ***By Chris Thursten***

Need to know

What is it?
Free-to-play roguelike MMO with twin-stick shooter DNA.

Influenced by
Rogue, *Robotron*

Play it on
2.33GHz CPU, 1GB RAM

Alternatively
Dungeons of Dreadmor, 82%

Copy protection
Steam, Online-only

The Steam release of *Realm of the Mad God* marks a new mainstream focus for the free-to-play browser MMO. It's a combination of *Rogue*, *Robotron* and *Diablo*, an isometric fantasy shooter where quests are handed to you on the fly, where you're never given a reason to stop running, shooting, or farming experience – until you die, and your character is deleted forever. It's simplistic and supremely silly, but also one of the most distinctive multiplayer experiences around.

Mad God knows how rudimentary it is, and the main reason it's enjoyable is that sense of being let in on the joke. It reduces MMO mechanics to the point of absurdity without rejecting them, revelling in the festive pointlessness of haring around with your mates blowing up an improbable number of elves.

Wide-eyed sprites and a looping up-tempo soundtrack contribute to this thrill of being swept up in a tidal wave of manic consumption. Being absorbed into one of *Realm of the Mad God*'s 'trains' is something every gamer should experience at least once: a gang of players that reaches a critical mass where no monster can stop it, then tears through the world in a leaderless stampede. Such Skinner Box game mechanics would be cynical elsewhere, but when accelerated to the point of ridiculousness they become charming, like listening to a despot give a speech on helium.

It's easy to emerge from one of these trains with a max-level character, and for the committed this is where *Realm of the Mad God* actually begins. Collecting special potions from bosses maxes out your character's stats, enabling you to take on tougher bosses and eventually several variants of the Mad God himself. Then you die, and your character's achievements are totted up and served back to you as a 'fame' rating, which contributes to your account's total score.

It's a game that's happy to discard your efforts in a heartbeat, and that complicates the inclusion of micro-transactions. Everything you can buy with real money is cosmetic, with the exception of dungeon portals that allow you to skip straight to a specific encounter. The cheaper items – armour dyes that cost between 25p to £1 – are lost with your character, while more expensive unlocks such as pets are permanently bound to your account. The game invites throwaway spending with the same anarchic spirit that encourages players to chase pretty green numbers in the wilderness. One is harmless, the other isn't.

If you rationalise the money you spend as a way of tipping the developers, it makes more sense. You're invited to participate exactly as much as you want, whether that's jumping in for 20 minutes or dedicating yourself to unlocking every class, buying every hat, and killing every god. It's your choice, after all – just don't be surprised if people think you're mad for trying. ■

◆ **Expect to pay** Free with real money item store ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Wild Shadow Studios
◆ **Developer** In-house ◆ **Multiplayer** Massively ◆ **Link** realmofthemadgod.com

VERDICT

An anarchic lo-fi MMO with a refreshing disregard for your sanity. Unrepentantly simplistic and fun.

PC GAMER **80**

WorldMags.net

SHAPE YOUR WORLD!

Follow the trail of Ogrest
Lead your nation and decide its future
Protect nature or exploit the environment
In WAKFU it's all up to you!

Wakfu®

Tactical turn-based MMORPG

Vibrant world with offbeat humour

12 character classes

Dynamic ecosystem

PLAY FOR FREE

www.WAKFU.com

© 2012 Ankama. All rights reserved.

ankama

WorldMags.net

ADEPT

MASS EFFECT 3 brings a wonderful space epic to a spectacular end. ***By Tom Francis***

Need to know

What is it?
The third and last game in BioWare's sci-fi action RPG series.

Influenced by
Star Wars, Serenity

Play it on
2.4GHz Intel Core 2 Duo, 4GB RAM, Radeon HD 4850 / GeForce 9800GT

Alternatively
Skyrim, 94%

Copy protection
Origin

PC GAMER EDITOR'S CHOICE ★★★★★

"Stomped on by mountain-size robot lobsters"

Mass Effect was a space RPG about killing a flying robot god – a Reaper. *Mass Effect 2* was about stopping one from being built. In *Mass Effect 3*, they've warped in from darkspace in their hundreds.

And that's all I'll say about the plot. This review will be spoiler-free even for those of you who've avoided the trailers and the demo.

In all three games, your time is split evenly between persuading people to help you and shooting people who won't. The original's strength was its main quest: a chase that felt both personally motivated and galactically important. *Mass Effect 2*'s plot was muddled and brief, but livened up by an exotic cast of new characters with interesting side stories.

Mass Effect 3 tries for the best of both worlds: an urgent and galaxy-critical plot that directly involves the entire crowd of oddball personalities the series has built up. And it works.

Inside of 20 minutes, you have a crucial goal and a clear route to achieving it. And unlike the previous games, every sidequest and adventure along the way is connected to that. The war gives everyone a reason to need your help, and everyone you help has reason to join the war.

That brings you into contact with just about every familiar face from the previous games, each of whom gets at least one fan-pleasing moment of bravado or violence. But the most remarkable thing about them is what makes *Mass Effect 3* unique: they could all be dead.

Lucky number

By the end of *Mass Effect 2*, only one of your 13 former squadmates is certain to be alive. Those who are each play a leading role in a subplot of *Mass Effect 3*. Those who aren't have their stories invisibly trimmed out or rewritten with new characters.

These newbies are not just bland stand-ins, either. In some cases, a friend's absence is filled by someone with a radically different motivation, and new relationships with the rest of the cast. A Turian squadmate summed up his feelings for one of these replacement characters mid fight:

"I don't like him!"

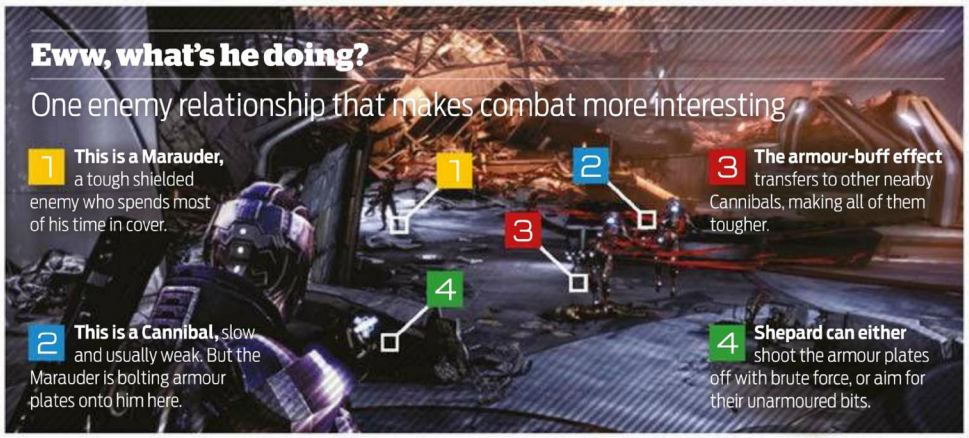
It's an extraordinarily complex, reactive and futuristic bit of storytelling, and it makes *Mass Effect 3* personal and unique for anyone who has a history with the series. If you're starting fresh, the game assumes the death of a few characters whose stories make less sense to new players, and leaves the rest alive.

Other than the colourful, beautifully designed characters, one of the main treats of a *Mass Effect* game is the colourful, beautifully designed planets. The large-scale problems you're facing in this third outing make your mission a whistle-stop tour of the key races' home worlds, their glowing sci-fi dreamscapes in the process of being stomped on by mountain-sized robot lobsters. It's spectacular, and it feels like exploring the heart of the gorgeous galaxy you've been skirting all this time.

Each away-mission to these places is a substantial, satisfying fight against one of several different factions. The combat feels another notch more impactful than that of *Mass Effect 2*. The classes are stronger and more distinct: the Infiltrator bursts heads with every sniper rifle shot, the Vanguard can slam herself into enemies over almost any distance or obstacle, and the Adept flings crowds of enemies into the air and rips them apart with biotic combos.

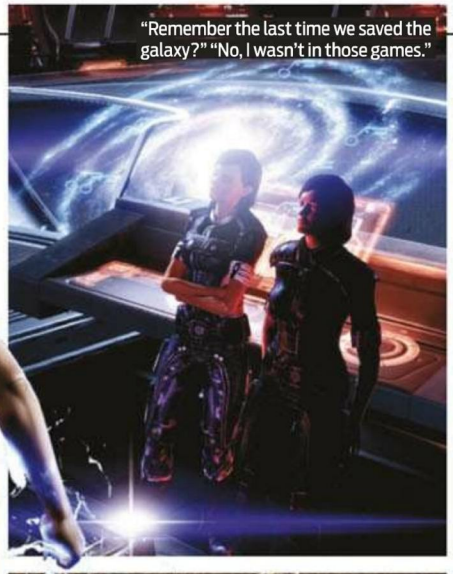
You fine-tune these powers as you level up, deciding between, say, a longer cloak duration or the ability to use one power without revealing yourself. And the weapons you find and buy give you interestingly different compromises between fire rate and stopping force – tweaked further with mods.

But the most radical and effective change to the RPG side of combat is the ability to choose your own balance between weapons and abilities. Any class can now take one of each weapon type into a fight, but the more you carry, the slower your powers recharge.



WorldMags.net

Let me put on my armour before getting in my mega-armour.


"Remember the last time we saved the galaxy?" "No, I wasn't in those games."

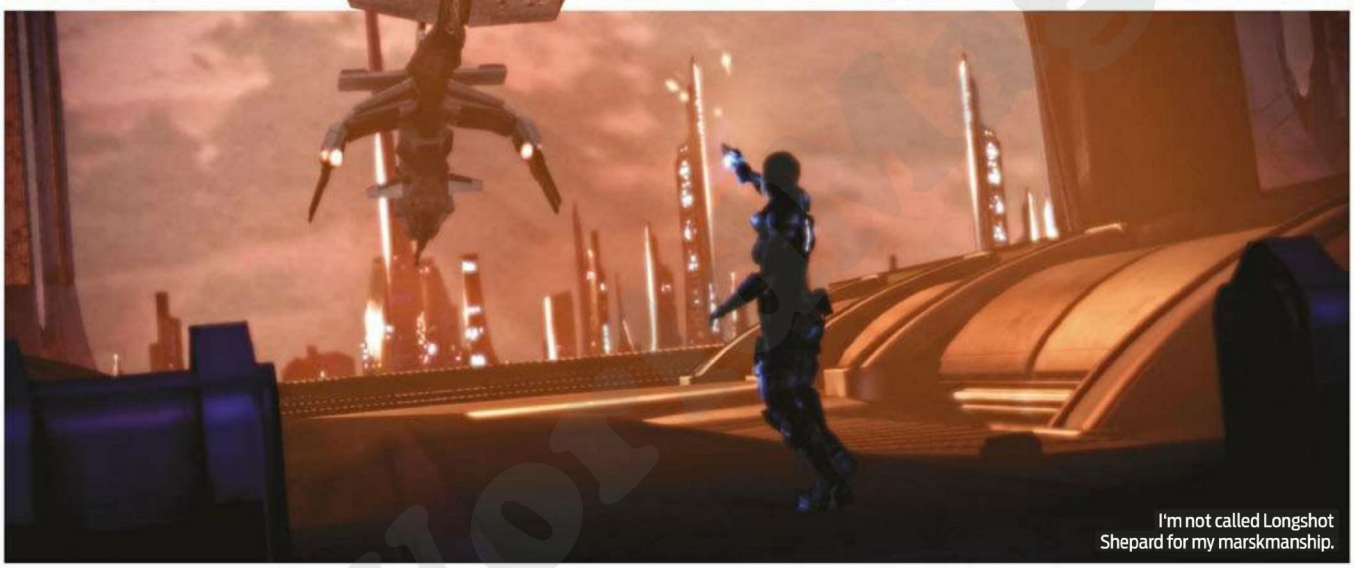
That pistol is special. That pistol is cool.

Gunship vs zombie robot birds.

The space battles are spoilt by video compression.

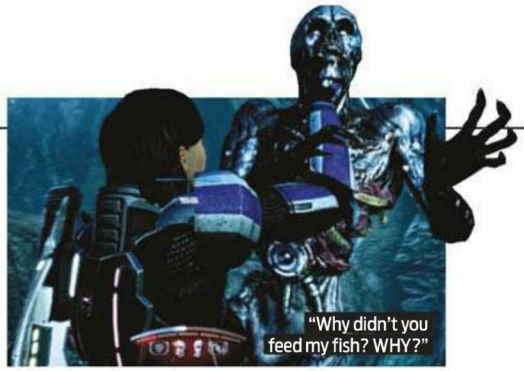
Weapons of the same type are varied, viable alternatives now.

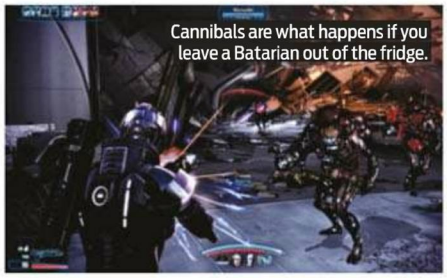
Combat takes place in more interesting arenas.

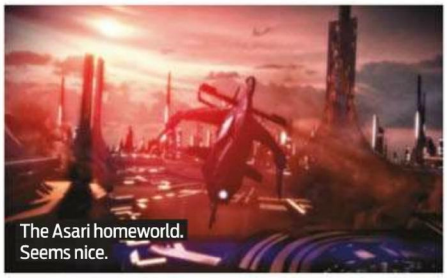

I'm not called Longshot Shepard for my marskmanship.

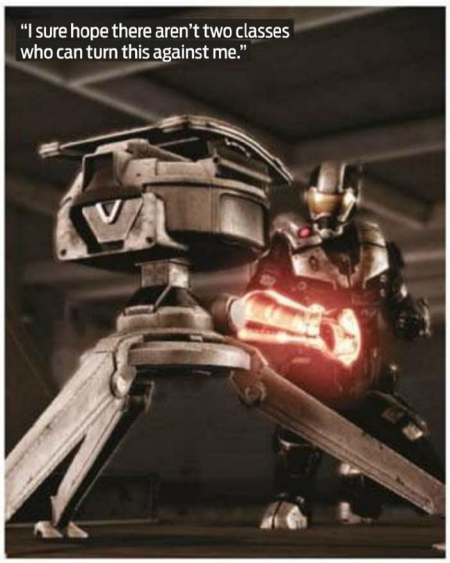
WorldMags.net

"I suggest we hit them in the real world, not this map."


"Why didn't you feed my fish? WHY?"


Cannibals are what happens if you leave a Batarian out of the fridge.


The Asari homeworld. Seems nice.


"I sure hope there aren't two classes who can turn this against me."

Some fights are a huge mess of troops and minibosses.

I'm not called Longshot Shepard for... damn, used that one.

This is what happens when you make fun of Batarians.

"Their toy ship is getting awaaaaay!"

WorldMags.net

I gave my Infiltrator a heavy shotgun, meaning she could use Cloak less often but deal a chunkier slam of damage when she struck. Trying an Adept, I shelved everything but a featherweight submachinegun, letting her wub out Singularities and Warp Fields every second. It finally feels like the class system has lost the last of its arbitrary restrictions, and you can create your own play style.

It all mixes well with your squadmate's powers. I liked to stealth behind enemy lines, hack their turrets, then let my biotic friend lift people out of cover to float them into range of their own subverted weapon. Once, a lifted soldier was pelted over to us by his own turret's fire, and my Cryo ammo power caused one of our shots to freeze him solid. He dropped to the ground and shattered. I felt like applauding.

The fights have also become more complex and less repetitive, thanks to a lot of smart interplay between enemy types (see 'Eew, what's he doing'). Some give each other armour or shielding, or feed on each other's corpses, or burst out of each other when you shoot the wrong sac. Huge, fast, melee-only Brutes force an alarming change of pace from cautious cover shooting. And the Banshee, a tall, spindly horror that teleports towards you as it shakes with rage, is properly traumatic to fight.

The best way to deal with all of this varies with the arena it's found in – something *Mass Effect 2* never managed. It's the difference between dreading the next prolonged combat sequence and relishing it.

The low points of the combat are the bigger boss fights, which too often involve one- or two-shot kills that hit you almost instantly and seemingly at random. If you have no pride, and lord knows I don't, you can always jam the difficulty level down to its new 'Narrative' mode for a moment: it's designed for non-gamers who just want the story, so it makes you virtually invincible.

The only unfixable problem, boss-wise, is a recurring character who's scripted to survive and escape your first few encounters. It's always painful to watch someone fail to shoot the bad guy in a cutscene. When it's my Shepard, a character I love for prematurely ending conversations with a bullet, it's downright agony.

I'll get the other irritations over with now. The spacebar – previously only used for sprinting, ducking, taking cover, using switches, talking to people and vaulting over things – is now also used for diving *away* from cover too. It makes an already maddeningly imprecise system utterly ridiculous. At least half my deaths were from the spacebar not doing what I expected it to.

We're on PCs. We have 128 keys. We can handle a separate button for taking cover.

The war effort

The multiplayer is a cooperative survival mode – you and your friends pick a class and fight off waves of enemies. It's not switched on at the time of writing, so I can't tell you how that plays beyond what you can try for yourself in the demo. But the way it affects the main game is needlessly problematic.

In singleplayer, everything you do accumulates 'war assets'. When you finish the game, how many of these you have determines how good an ending you get: how well the final fight goes for your side. Success in co-op multiplies your war assets, up to twice their normal value. That means that if you only play singleplayer, or want to finish singleplayer first, you'll have to grind the living hell out of its most tedious fetch quests to get the best ending.

These quests generally involve scouring the galaxy for a planet someone mentioned, scanning it, then returning to the Citadel. I did every proper quest I could find, but didn't play multiplayer and skipped most of these empty FedEx ones. The ending I got... I won't say how, but it could have gone a *lot* better.

In general, too, the end of the series is a mixed bag. Satisfying in some ways, nonsensical in others, and ultimately too simple. But the sheer scale of the adventure it's ending – and the music, which is gorgeous throughout – gives it an emotional impact that goes beyond its plot payload.

It left me feeling incredibly sad.

Shepard is the best game character I've ever played. She's been an ongoing improv collaboration between me and BioWare to build a hero that works for their plot, but suits my tastes.

Since we composed her first inspiring speech to the crew when she took charge of the Normandy, a commanding, brutally effective woman has emerged through 60 hours of tough decisions. She's killed thousands who got in her way, hung up on the interstellar Council four times, punched the same reporter in three different interviews and shot people mid-sentence. But she has also formed conflicted, quiet, sometimes touching relationships with some of the alien weirdos dragged along on her mission. Relationships that gave her character a gentler side I didn't expect, but which made sense of the person I had in my head.

I'm thinking back through all that as the credits roll. At the end of them a box pops up. It says: "you can continue to build Shepard's legend through further gameplay and downloadable content" then reloads my last save.

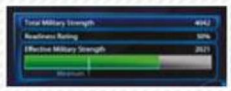
So now I'm laughing instead. ■

"The Banshee teleports toward you, shaking with rage"

War maths How the multiplayer and singleplayer connect

War Assets
Completing a singleplayer quest in this sector of the galaxy gets you a War Asset with a certain value – say 100.

Readiness
Completing a multiplayer map set in the same sector adds a percentage to the value of its War Assets – say 20%.



Effectiveness
Your military effectiveness is a product of the two – in this case 120. It determines how well the ending goes.

◆ **Expect to pay** £35 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Electronic Arts ◆ **Developer** BioWare
◆ **Multiplayer** 2-4 players online ◆ **Link** www.masseffect.com

VERDICT

A culmination of all the choice, character and intrigue of *Mass Effect*. A satisfying end to a spectacular adventure.

PC GAMER **93**

WorldMags.net

Windows®. Life without walls™, PC Specialist recommends Windows 7

pcspecialist.co.uk

Gaming on a budget? Then look no further than the Fusion 450 Gaming PC. You get the gaming performance but without the price tag!

Fusion 450 Gaming PC

- AMD® Llano A6-3670K Processor
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 4GB Samsung DDR3 1333MHz RAM
- 1TB Serial ATA II Hard Drive
- Integrated AMD Radeon HD 6000 Graphics
- 24x Dual Layer DVD-Writer
- 450W Quiet Dual Rail Power Supply
- PCS Black Enigma Case
- 3 Year Silver Warranty

from £449*

With an AMD Quad-Core CPU, Radeon HD Graphics and a massive 1TB Hard Drive, the Fusion X800 will keep you one step ahead of the competition!

Fusion X800 Gaming PC

- AMD® FX-8120 Processor
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 4GB Samsung DDR3 1333MHz RAM
- 1TB Serial ATA II Hard Drive
- 1GB AMD Radeon HD7770 Graphics
- 24x Dual Layer DVD-Writer
- Corsair TX650 Power Supply
- CoolerMaster Storm Enforcer Case
- 3 Year Silver Warranty

from £799*

The new Intel i7-2600 CPU offers excellent value for money. Coupled with the GTX570, this PC will power through all of the latest games!

Vortex 1000 Gaming PC

- 2nd Gen Intel® Core™ i7-2600 Processor
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 8GB Samsung DDR3 1333MHz RAM
- 1TB Serial ATA III 6Gb/s Hard Drive
- 1.25GB nVidia GeForce GTX 570 Graphics
- 12x BluRay ROM + 16x DVD-RW/ROM
- Corsair TX650 Power Supply
- PCS Maelstrom T900 Gaming Case
- 3 Year Silver Warranty

from £999*

Take your gaming to the next level with the FSX1000 Plus PC. There is plenty of grunt to power through anything you dare throw at it!

FSX 1000 Gaming PC

- 2nd Gen Intel® Core™ i7-2500k Processor
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 8GB Kingston Hyper-X 1600 MHz RAM
- 1TB Serial ATA III 6Gb/s Hard Drive
- 1.25GB nVidia GeForce GTX 570 Graphics
- Corsair TX650 Power Supply
- CoolerMaster CM690 MkII Case
- 24" Widescreen TFT Monitor (1920 x 1080)
- 3 Year Silver Warranty

from £1099*

The hugely powerful AMD FX-8150 is coupled up with "the worlds fastest GPU", the HD7970.This really is one beast of a gaming rig!

Fusion 1600 Gaming PC

- AMD® FX-8150 Eight Core Processor
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 8GB Kingston Hyper-X 1600MHz RAM
- 120GB Intel® 320 SSD + 2TB Serial ATA III HDD
- 3GB AMD Radeon HD7970 Graphics
- CooliT ECO II Fat Boy Liquid CPU Cooler
- Corsair TX850 Power Supply
- Corsair Carbide Series 400R Gaming Case
- 3 Year Silver Warranty

from £1599*

The all new Intel Core i7-3930K Processore is now the benchmark for any new gaming PC. This beast is primed to power through any game out today!

Vortex X79 Extreme PC

- 2nd Gen Intel® Core™ i7-3930K Processor
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 16GB Kingston Hyper-X Genesis 1600MHz
- 120GB Intel SSD + 2TB Serial ATA III HDD
- 3GB nVidia GeForce GTX 580 Graphics
- 12x BluRay ROM + 16x DVD-RW/ROM
- Corsair TX850 Power Supply
- CoolerMaster HAF-X Gaming Case
- 3 Year Silver Warranty

from £1999*

Powered by ASUS
uk.asus.com

order online or call us on: **0844 499 4000**

email:enquiries@pcspecialist.co.uk

Windows 7 Home Premium

WorldMags.net

Work hard, play harder!

Gaming at pcspecialist.co.uk

Enigma III 540 Laptop

- 15.6" Widescreen Display (1920 x 1080)
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 2nd Gen Intel® Core™ i5-2450M
- 4GB Corsair® DDR3 1333MHz RAM
- 500GB WD Scorpio Black SATA II HDD
- 1GB nVidia GeForce GT 540M Graphics
- Gigabit LAN & Wireless N Network Card
- 3 Year Silver Warranty

from £649*

The Enigma III 540 is the perfect low-cost gaming laptop. The 2nd Gen Intel Dual Core CPU, 4GB RAM & nVidia Graphics Card makes the Enigma III ideal for portable gaming on a budget!

Optimus II Laptop

- 17.3" Widescreen Display (1920 x 1080)
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 2nd Gen Intel® Core™ i7-2670QM
- 8GB Samsung® DDR3 1333Mhz RAM
- 500GB WD Scorpio Black SATA II HDD
- 1GB nVidia GeForce GT 555M Graphics
- Gigabit LAN & Wireless N Network Card
- 3 Year Silver Warranty

from £799*

The 17.3" Optimus II Laptop is fitted with a 2nd Gen Intel Quad Core CPU, massive 8GB RAM & an nVidia Graphics Card! What more could you want under £800?

Vortex II 15" Laptop

- 15.6" Full HD Widescreen Display (1920 x 1080)
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 2nd Gen Intel® Core™ i7-2670QM
- 8GB Samsung DDR3 1333MHz RAM
- 500GB WD Scorpio Black SATA II HDD
- 1.5GB nVidia GeForce GTX560M Graphics
- Gigabit LAN & Wireless N Network Card
- 3 Year Silver Warranty

from £1089*

An extremely powerful 2nd Gen Intel Core based laptop. Paired with the GeForce GTX560M, this Laptop is a great gaming laptop, with **desktop rivalling performance!**

Vortex II 17" Laptop

- 17.3" Full HD Widescreen Display (1920 x 1080)
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 2nd Gen Intel® Core™ i7-2670QM
- 8GB Samsung DDR3 1333MHz RAM
- 80GB Intel SSD + 500GB SATA II HDD
- 2GB AMD Radeon HD6990M Graphics
- Gigabit LAN & Wireless N Network Card
- 3 Year Silver Warranty

from £1349*

The pinnacle of our gaming laptop range. The Vortex II 17 houses the most powerful Intel CPUs, 8GB Kingston RAM and AMD's flag ship mobile graphics card - gaming heaven!

For the latest technology and most powerful gaming PCs & Laptops, call or go online!

Flexible Finance Available!
Have the option to settle within 12 months and pay no interest!

SAVE £15 off every order!
Enter code **PCG26**

Join the community at pcspecialist.co.uk/forums

WorldMags.net

FLY ON THE PAYWALL

Microsoft's classic sim series goes free-to-play with the cloud-based **MICROSOFT FLIGHT**. ***By Steve Hogarty***

Need to know

What is it?
A whittled down version of *MSFS*, now a free to play, arcade-ified funfest.

Influenced by
Pilotwings, capitalism

Play it on
Dual Core 3GHz, 1024MB ATI Radeon HD 5670 /GeForce 9800 GT, 6GB RAM

Alternatively
X-Plane 10, if you like your simulators a bit more po-faced.

Copy protection
Games for Windows Live login

I've never been birthed by Enya. I've never even gestated inside her womb. But I imagine the experience of floating around inside her amniotic fluid as a foetus is similar to visiting *Microsoft Flight*'s main menu.

The flight sim wastes no time in serenading you in an echoing, listless wail of lyric-free yawning and aspirational, muffled lady-howls, albeit set against a rolling, majestic cloudscape rather than the Gaelic songstress's pelvic floor. It's quite relaxing really, a bit like being dead.

Flight is an extensive whittling down of the *MS Flight Sim* series, to a hyper-refined free-to-play stub that leaves the flight model of *Flight Simulator X* intact but pops it into a lovely grass skirt. Rather than an entire planet of airports to explore, the game focuses exclusively on Hawaii, recreating that tropical paradise with more precision than previous games and featuring all of its most (and many of its least) recognisable landmarks.

It's also taken some giant, hardcore-baiting steps towards mass appeal: planes can now be flown competently under the command of a mouse and keyboard or Xbox 360 gamepad, without the need for joysticks and independent, authentically weighted throttle controls. It runs well on lower spec machines, and you gain experience, level up and unlock more content as you play. Most of the realism sliders have been torn out in favour of four simple checkboxes, you can skip the most boring bits of long-haul flights, and in the free version, you have access to just two planes, one island and a handful of short challenges.

"This is a fun and exciting deviation for the series"

It's-a-me, Microsoft

Those challenges are reminiscent of Nintendo classic *Pilotwings*, as you chuck your plane through floating rings, volcanic craters and narrow canyons, weave through wind farms and high-rise towers and perform challenging landings in increasingly iffy weather conditions. Additional XP is awarded for aerobatic manoeuvres, smooth landings and flying by night.

You also undertake scripted missions, such as escorting a photographer around Hawaii's historic landing strips, or flying an astronomer above the cloud layer for a glimpse of a rare celestial event. You'll also find recurring jobs posted at airports. Missions and jobs are all voice-acted, by proper voice-actors too, lending *Flight* some unexpected character and warmth. Aerosadists can even upset passengers by flying inverted, or freeze them by climbing above 12,000 feet.

Your two free starter planes are the prototype Icon A5, a futuristic two-seater seaplane that resembles a jet ski crossed with a Reliant Robin, and an agile Stearman crop duster that's ideal for the game's stunt show challenges. Two additional planes can be purchased at the time of writing, though the highlight of the bunch – the beautiful World War II era P-51 Mustang – is oddly missing a cockpit view.

Also available is the *Hawaiian Adventure Pack* (1600 Microsoft points, about £13), which unlocks the remaining Hawaiian islands, a further plane and a dozens of missions and challenges. This is *Microsoft Flight*'s actual asking price, as it's where the bulk of the game's missions live once you've exhausted the free larks.

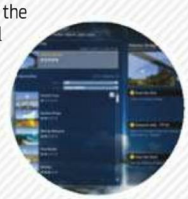
Fusty purists might choke on their joysticks at the shift in focus away from hobbyist aviators and towards sun-and-sea casual gamers, but this is a fun and exciting deviation from a sadly mothballed series. Download it, and if you're still playing after two hours, that *Hawaiian Adventure Pack* is worth prying open your virtual space-wallet. ■

Treasure hunt

Tracking down *Flight*'s hidden packages

Aerocache converters
Hawaii is littered with hidden packages called Aerocaches, which you must find by Googling (or Binging, as the game desperately implores) supplied clues.

A bridge too far
Most clues are the names of local bridges or landmarks that don't appear in maps. Instead you'll find yourself browsing Flickr and Panoramio for GPS coordinates.



Give it legs
Once you've got some idea of the Aerocache's location, you usually just have to fly through it to cross it off. Some require you to land nearby and find it on foot, however.

◆ **Expect to pay** Free-to-play, £13 adventure pack ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Microsoft
◆ **Developer** Microsoft ◆ **Multiplayer** Up to 16 ◆ **Link** microsoftflight.com

VERDICT

This is a flight sim light on content, but it's not like you have to pay for it, is it? You cheeky entitled fusspot, you.

PC GAMER **82**

WorldMags.net

Fly like this and your bi-plane will become a bye-plane. Ahaha!

The P-51 Mustang is the highest climber at launch.

ATC has been dropped, so no more muffled radio chat roulette.

Aerobatics will freak out your invisible passengers.

You can walk around, but it's painfully low-res.

The Na Pali coastline should be familiar to fans of Lost.

Helicopters are mentioned in a loading screen. Coming soon?

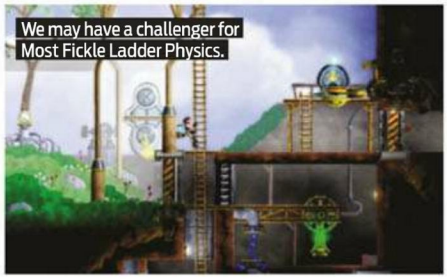
The weather won't change as you fly, but some conditions look astonishingly pretty.

WorldMags.net

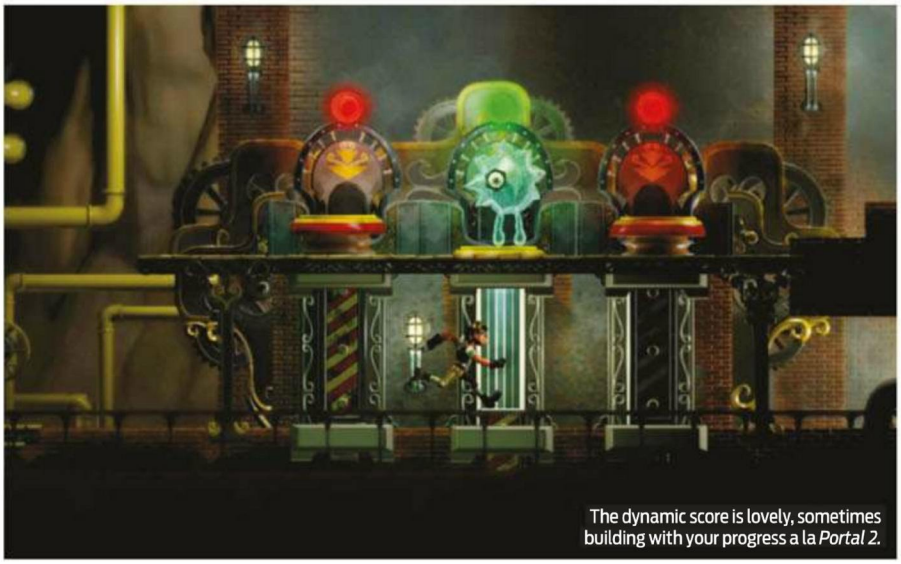
What hosepipe ban?

QA hazard warning: water next to lava looks like lava.

The environments are an indemnity lawyer's dream.



We may have a challenger for Most Fickle Ladder Physics.



The dynamic score is lovely, sometimes building with your progress a la *Portal 2*.

TRICKLE TREAT

Slurp and squirt in puzzle-platformer **VESSEL**. But is its fluid simulation a liquid asset? ***By Marsh Davies***

Need to know

What is it?
Puzzle-platformer with flowing liquids and gloopy AI helpers.

Influenced by
Braid, Limbo, PixelJunk Shooter

Play it on
Dual Core 2GHz, 2GB RAM, Radeon HD 2400/GeForce 7600 (Shader Model 3.0)

Alternatively
The Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom, 80%

Copy protection
None

In *Vessel*'s alternate universe of gushing smokestacks and spinning cogwheels, industry has been supported by a single inventor – you – and your world-changing creation: the fluro. These semi-sentient servile beings coalesce from available liquids, and have an often self-destructive desire to jump on large red buttons.

A laboratory mishap reveals their many and varied adaptations, which turn out to be handy for solving the throw-switch and pressure-plate puzzles of this 2D platform world.

A supply of fluro 'seeds' enables you to conjure these critters wherever you choose. Drop one, douse it in water, lava or even fruit juice, and a gormless helper will arise. Different seeds provide fluros of different behaviours. Some are fixated on button pushing, others chase you or seek out light sources, and still others look for liquids matching their constituent mass and slurp them until they burst. Environments often have grills through which only fluros can pass, so much of the game involves working out where to place a fluro such that it gambols through a run of switches in the right order while pursuing the appropriate behavioural goal.

It's a nice enough trick, and repeated in many guises with clever complications: lava fluros and water fluros can be coaxed into collisions, activating steam-powered contraptions. Fruit-pulp fluros grow on trees in two flavours – mix them and they detonate. The emphasis on fluid dynamics means occasionally adjusting the angle of a spraying nozzle, or thinking carefully about where you are going to squirt your own canister-supplied hose.

There's often a platforming or timing element to these otherwise gentle intellectual challenges, and this is where the game comes a little unstuck: movement in this world is awkward, your character's gangly marionette body snagging on some things and sliding off others. The graphics have a stunning gloss, but it doesn't help in differentiating background detail from foreground collision object.

Nor are the fluid dynamics, physics and AI behaviours quite reliable enough in their simulation to deliver satisfyingly pat results. Some solutions end up an ugly, frantic fudge, or jeopardised by some random spasm of fluro whim. The swooping, zooming camera doesn't help, often truncating useful information, erasing off-screen fluros from existence, or simply pulling out so far that the game sputters into super slow-motion.

But if *Vessel*'s action is sometimes shabby and erratic, at least the fluid simulation is a real novelty for this genre. Every now and again, those dynamic elements come together to deliver a solution that rivals the "Eureka!" moment of any other puzzler. Despite its occasional chaos and fussy foibles, *Vessel*'s central gimmick just about holds water. ■

◆ **Expect to pay** £11 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Strange Loop Games ◆ **Developer** In-house
◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** www.strangeloopgames.com

VERDICT

A novel use of fluids, but sometimes scuppered by cumbersome platforming and the annoyingly happenstance physics.

PC GAMER **72**

WorldMags.net

SOFTCORE

SNUGGLE TRUCK swaps tension for toys.

By Matt Lees

A game about steering a rusted truck of hopeful Mexicans through dusty cartoon levels, *Smuggle Truck*'s saccharin cheer only made its subject matter feel more uncomfortable.

Your goal in the remake remains the same: get your truck across the border as quickly as you can, and try not to lose too many passengers along the way. Following political outrage over the original game, however, and a failed submission to Apple's Marketplace, developers Owlchemy have decided to try a different tack. As well as trimming off half the crucial consonant, they've replaced your immigrant passengers with fluffy toys.

I'd like to be able to cheer their efforts, but the change is too much of a compromise. In the original game, as a poignant reminder of just how lacking the alternatives were for your passengers, there was a 'legal immigration' mode: a room which asked you to sit and wait for 19 years in the hope of eventually getting a green card. Grind the political edge down to dust, and what's left feels painfully twee – a Charlie Chalk joke that's forgotten its punchline.

The remaining game is remarkably basic: use up and down to control your truck's speed, and left and right to keep it balanced. A level creator and leaderboards add longevity, but that doesn't mean much when the overall package looks and feels like a half-baked port of a iPhone game.

It's not often you see a developers actually clone *their own game*, but this oddity is half the entertainment. If you'd rather avoid being caught with the fuzz, the original is available at *smuggletruck.com*. ■

PC GAMER 45

◆ **Expect to pay** £3.99 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Steam
◆ **Developer** Owlchemy Labs ◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** www.smuggletruck.com

ALIEN INVASION

Set the sky on fire with nostalgic arcade-em-up, TITAN ATTACKS! *By Kim Richards*

Take a pinch of *Space Invaders*, a touch of *Galaga*, smear the whole thing with rainbow colours and voila, you have *Titan Attacks!* – a compact yet utterly addictive arcade shooter that'll keep you pew-pew-pewing until the arthritis hits.

For those who never experienced the simplistic joy of *Space Invaders* – tiny children and those of you who've paid off the mortgage on the rock you live under – the premise is replicated here. Waves of alien attackers descend, and you, a single defence tank that can only move left or right, must blast them down while dodging counter laser fire.

Titan Attacks! improves this classic formula with more aliens (including cheaty mothership bosses and dive-bombing saucers) and tank upgrades. Finish a wave off, and you can spend the cash you earned on faster guns, screen-demolishing smart bombs and heaven-sent shield refills – that last one being a purchase you will want to plug a *lot* of dollars into.

Titan Attacks! sticks firmly to it's old-school roots in *all* aspects: when you game over, it's most definitely Game Over. Scores are reset to zero, power-ups go bye-bye, and you start back at the very first level. Which is fine, if this challenge is the sort of thing you're looking for. But for the less patient gamer, it is *damned* frustrating when you make that fatal mistake.

Stick with it, however, and it's as satisfying to blow enemy ships into blocky smithereens as it was for you/your parents/your children (delete as appropriate) in the '70s. It all depends on how long your icy composure can stand up against the dreaded 'Game Over' screen. ■

PC GAMER 78

◆ **Expect to pay** £2.99 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Self-published
◆ **Developer** Puppy Games ◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** bit.ly/yFA9Yf

WorldMags.net

CHAMPION

Good things have come to those who waited for **LEAGUE OF LEGENDS** to level up. ***By Rich McCormick***

Need to know

What is it?
Modern take on *Defence of the Ancients*, with professional quality players.

Influenced by
Defence of the Ancients

Play it on
Dual core CPU, GeForce 8800 or above, 4GB RAM, 1MB internet connection

Alternatively
Heroes of Newerth, 71%

Copy protection
Online account

To an outsider, *League of Legends*' riotous success is strange. Stuffed with arcane language and reams of hard statistics – hangovers from the *Warcraft III* mod that spawned it – it's a fiercely competitive team-based RPG.

LoL – like *Defence of the Ancients* before it – pitches two teams against each other in a battle to destroy an enemy tower, and demands each player maintain a standard of perfection. Make mistakes, and you'll be decried by your teammates as a terrible failure. It's not an easy game to learn; it's not even an easy game to understand.

But 32 million players do. In the nearly three years since the free-to-play game's release, its developers Riot Games have steered it down a course from niche to global phenomenon, smashing player figures untouched by most games save *World of Warcraft*. 4.2 million people play every day. 1.3 million are online at the same time – which means half as many people are playing *LoL* as are playing every game on Steam *combined*.

"4.2 million people play *League of Legends* every day"

Domination stations

The new mode mapped

KEY

- Spawn points
- Health relics
- Greater relics
- Speed shrines
- Capture points

This game is different to the one I first reviewed back in late 2009. By virtue of its astronomical success, it has been reshaped by an influx of players even the most optimistic of gaming Nostradamuses would have giggled at predicting. The result is a game that has both changed almost beyond measure, and hardly changed at all.

LoL's go-to mode is 'classic' five on five, fought by two teams amid the jungles and three lanes of Summoner's Rift – a map cemented in *DotA*'s early iterations. Players control champions of varying skills – from giant yeti tanks to rabbit-suit wearing stealth assassins – marshalling them around the ceaseless stream of AI 'minions' spewing from each team's home base at timed intervals. Players dance in and out of combat, killing small armies of AI foes, choosing their moments to deploy more powerful abilities to assassinate their human-controlled opposite numbers.

Dominate me

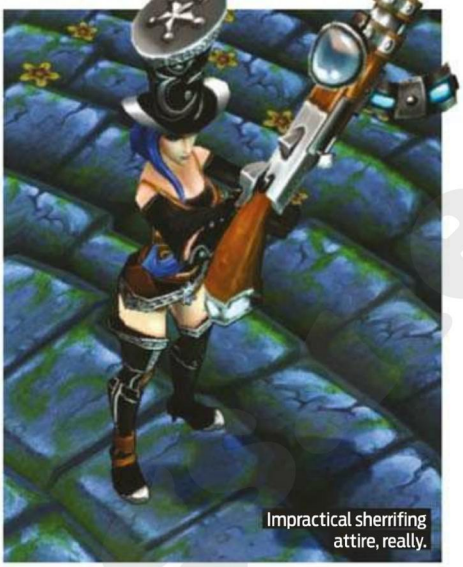
League of Legends' recent updates have added support for bot play, as well as a new Dominion mode. The traditional *DotA* match takes place on three fronts down three channels; Dominion lets players fight over five capture points, opening up multiple fronts at once and making for a tighter, scrappier, shorter game. It's a welcome addition, but also feels less precise. For lower-level players, it's ideal – the chaos of five capture points makes games more unpredictable – but it lacks the classic mode's refinement and precision.

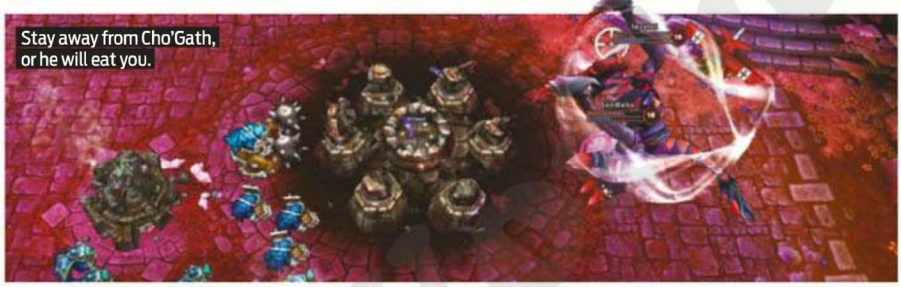
Both modes ask champions to fight each other, and both modes share champion combat tactics. These champions follow broad archetypes, laid down in Riot's tagging system: chosen characters are mages, assassins, tanks, etc. These archetypes, like the classic game mode, haven't changed much since 2009. But two and a half years has given Riot time to expand their champion roster tremendously, bumping the original group of 40 up to double that. Free-to-play players have access to a revolving portion of these, or they can pay the price to unlock a specific champion, for around a fiver in real cash, or double-digit hours in in-game currency. Given the time investment to learn a new character, the price is fair. Cheapskates get enough choice, anyway: Riot's conveyor belt means the list of free to use champions changes every week.

More questionable purchases are skins and runes. The former are cosmetic-only, for long-term champion fans; the latter are a necessity in mid- to top-level play. Fortunately, they're cheaper than a new character, and most players won't need to flit between them, as they'll settle on just one or two main champions. But *League of Legends*' genius – and a portion of the reason for the game's success – is in how effectively it makes each champion *feel* different.

I like to play ranged classes. Given the choice in *LoL*, I'll play Caitlyn. She carries a sniper rifle as long as she is, and most of her abilities use it to spew out long-distance damage. I press Q and I'm given a line trajectory. Left click and Caitlyn fires a shot that hurts a number of targets unlucky enough to be in the way. Press W, and she can plop down a beartrap designed to snare a chasing or fleeing champion. E, deployed with another trajectory marker, fires a puff of air out of Caitlyn's rifle that whooshes her backwards. R – her 'ultimate' move – unleashes a hyper-powerful sniper shot on a target that slices an unearthly amount off their health.

WorldMags.net





WorldMags.net

WorldMags.net

A few rounds of practice with Caitlyn, and I began weaving these skills together. I learned that a Q shot was best saved for chipping away at an enemy champion. That my W-activated bear traps could be dropped behind bushes or in thick teamfights, catching human foes too busy to squint at every segment of the screen. That my E air-shot could bounce me high enough to hop over walls, providing an easy escape from chasing foes, or – even better – the chance to nab a quick kill on a limping enemy.

League of Legends encourages you to develop these combinations on your own. I switched to Sejuani – a polar-bear riding, mace-swinging she-Viking tank. Sejuani is designed to be placed in the thick of combat, absorbing damage, distracting and slowing opponents long enough for your teammates to get their blows in. Taking a pounding, I rode my ursine steed away from a multi-man rumble. I should have teleported back to the map starting point to refuel on mana and hitpoints, but holding on for a few seconds and anticipating the exit routes of my foes allowed me to activate Sejuani's ultimate attack: a lobbed ice-bomb that freezes opponents solid. I racked up an elusive triple kill.

Testing, testing

Even among *LoL*'s self-acknowledged archetypes, there's a huge range of variety. In my quest for ranged champions, I experimented. I found Miss Fortune – dual pistols and a blistering attack speed – too short-range. Cowboy Graves' gun rivalled Caitlyn's in size, but fired too slowly and in too broad an arc for my tastes.

My decisions were underpinned by hard statistics, but I didn't have to pore over spreadsheets to work out my favourite ways to play: I simply played them. A new champion release is a cause for feverish tinkering and adaptation as a lungful of life is blown into established champion relationships. For a game so dependent on behind the scenes number crunching, in full flow *LoL* feels wonderfully organic.

But it's the underlying bedrock of buffs, debuffs, attack power and defence ratings that has helped give the game its greatest asset: its community. Thousands of internet pages are devoted to builds, guides and tips for each of the game's champions, where faceless players have computed the perfect item and skill combinations to make their chosen champion a champion choice. Riot have engendered this endless tinkering: their rune system lets players slot stat-affecting sigils into character sheets that can be shared across champions. Talent trees also allow customisation in one of three fields – attack, defence and support.

League of Legends' community is both a blessing and a curse. In its angelic form it's a font of pure knowledge, serenely holding forth on damage outputs and item combinations until the end of time. Professional casters and helpful players are the guardians of this aspect of the game's id, providing help and guidance wherever they rest their benevolent gaze. Should the stars align and you be blessed with four such companions on your team, *League of Legends* becomes a multiplayer experience like no other. A good team can discern and react to problems on the fly – even without VOIP chat, which is still missing – overlapping and pitching-in as a team where necessary.

The other face of the community, however, is a gnarled, twisted thing. Teams are routinely spiked by one incessant whinger, hell-bent on ruining the experience for nine other people thanks to some perceived slight. The problem lies in the game's model. One empirically bad player on a team will easily cause the unpicking of his entire troupe. If he falls to an opponent too often and they level up faster than expected, that opponent will become a force unstoppable by others on the map, no matter their personal skill.

And this brings us to *League of Legends* balance problems. The trajectory of the game's 45-minute core mode – which remains unchanged, as I've mentioned – is usually set after 15 minutes. The next half an hour is a slow grind as the team with the slight advantage presses their boot further into the windpipe of the losing team. Moments of deft individual skill mean nothing if the rest of your group are hurling themselves against a lethal brick wall, and the result is a playerbase quick to anger and point accusatory fingers.

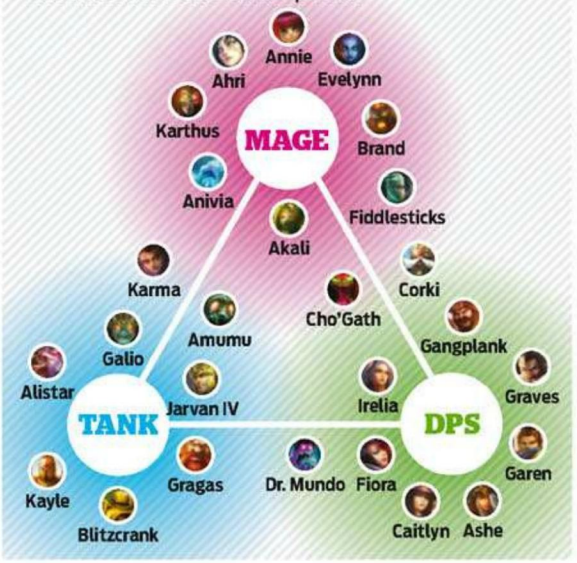
But, for better or worse, these are the trappings of *DotA*. Even while tying itself to a potentially alienating set of game mechanics, Riot have made strong strides towards bettering the game for players of all backgrounds. Their champion release schedule has beaten back balance problems with the shine of newness and experimentation. Dominion mode hasn't replaced the game's classic mode, but it provides a more unpredictable experience, scores skittering around as leads change hands.

The laudable aspects of the community are inspired and fed from the top down. Riot stay in constant, charismatic contact with their players. Their adjustments have softened the edges that existed two years ago: what was once an imposing, featureless edifice has now unfurled, making a game that has rightfully succeeded despite itself. The arena contained within can still be unwelcoming, but the sheer weight of numbers prove Riot have done an admirable job enticing players into it. ■

◆ Expect to pay Free, £4.80 for most champions **◆ Release** Out now **◆ Publisher** Riot Games
◆ Developer In-house **◆ Multiplayer** 5v5, bot support **◆ Link** leagueoflegends.com

Axis of awesome

A flavour of *LoL*'s champions



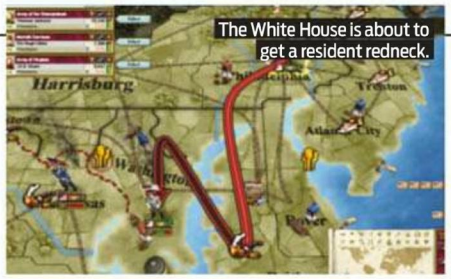
"A polar-bear riding, mace-swinging she-Viking tank"

VERDICT

Free to play's biggest success story, *League of Legends* proves palatable for almost all despite structural weaknesses.

PC GAMER 85

WorldMags.net



NEW VIC

Gladstone? Yes, Tim is pretty happy with **VICTORIA II: A HOUSE DIVIDED**. *By Tim Stone*

Need to know

What is it?
A solid add-on for a solid depiction of 19th century nation and empire building.

Influenced by
Fan feedback

Play it on
Core 2 Duo, 2GB RAM, 512MB 3D card

Alternatively
Crusader Kings 2, 87%

Copy protection
Gamersgate

Victoria II was one of my biggest disappointments of 2010. I impulse-bought it assuming there'd be lots of spaniel-cuddling and WASDing a grumpy crinoline-clad VR around 3D reconstructions of Balmoral and Osborne House. Imagine my dismay on discovering it was a seriously detailed, seriously dry simulation of colonial-era geopolitics.

This expansion doesn't add the strokable lapdogs, gilded palaces or Corset Tightness slider the game badly needs, but it does nip, tuck and augment in other pleasing ways.

For starters there's a new grand campaign portal. A team of Paradox's research urchins has spent the last year figuring out what 200+ of the world's countries produced, controlled, believed and thought of each other, circa 1861.

This extra entry point permits participation in the disintegration of the US. Relatively crude battle mechanics mean you won't end up with a civil war as interesting or credible as the one offered by Ageod's *American Civil War*, but to be fair, that gem didn't give you the opportunity to end games in 1936 with a victorious Confederacy lording it over Canada, Mexico and significant parts of South America.

Violent land-grabbing is harder in *AHD* than vanilla *Vicky 2*. Tweaked economics make funding large militaries trickier, and a new war justification system means you now can't swan across borders at the drop of a Pickelhaube. I'm not entirely convinced about the latter. Where previously, aspiring Kaiser Bills were slowed by infamy penalties and cost concerns, now they've also got to press a 'justify war' button and wait a few months with fingers crossed, before violating the territory of even the most minuscule state.

Less double-edged are the host of interface improvements and the changes to the way internal discontent is represented. Instead of tearing-up cobblestones and overturning police landaus, hacked-off citizens may now decide to vent their frustration peacefully by joining the 19th century equivalents of CND. Should these parliament-impacting pressure groups lose patience and take up arms, an automatic rebel-hunting option cuts down on the all-or-nothing hopscotch that masquerades as war in *Vicky 2*.

Serious martial reforms must surely be on the cards for the next expansion. Hopefully any future add-on will also add a little more colour to colonialism. For a game set during the golden era of European power projection, *AHD* really doesn't make much effort to simulate its subtleties. While last year's *Pride of Nations* shot itself in the foot with interminable turn processing, it handled the scramble for Africa and Asia with far more imagination.

An *AHD*ed *Vicky 2* can be a mesmerising thing, but a chilly one. I put it down to all the stats and the shameful lack of spaniel petting. ■

◆ **Expect to pay** £15 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Paradox ◆ **Developer** In-house
◆ **Multiplayer** 32 players ◆ **Link** www.victoria2.com

VERDICT

Brings numerous improvements to the original *Victoria 2*, but this rotund royal will still be too dour for most.

PC GAMER **73**

WorldMags.net

EMPTY SPACE

In **JULIA**, half of what I play is meaningless. ***By Phil Savage***

JULIA is full of mysteries. Why wasn't Rachel Manners woken from cryogenic sleep with the rest of her crew? What happened to them? Who thought it was a good idea to include a near-identical copy of *Mass Effect 2*'s much-hated planet scanning minigame?

But the biggest question is never answered: *what the hell does JULIA stand for?* Never mind Chekhov's gun: if an acronym is introduced in the first act of your game, bloody well explain it.

If only that was the end of this adventure puzzler's problems. Rachel must repair the damage caused by a recent meteor strike, then explore planets for clues to the fate of her shipmates. Doing this involves minigames. Lots of them.

The best are simple but engaging puzzles: building circuits with less parts than its blueprint requires, or deciphering number codes with help from punctuation. But all too frequently the game falls back on object hunts and timed challenges, requiring almost no thought and only basic interaction. The bulk of *JULIA* feels like an attempt to pad out the story.

At least that story is an interesting exploration of an unfamiliar solar system. It plays out as a series of text quests as Mobot, the ship's exploration bot, goes rummaging through the remains of former research posts. But it's hard to stay enthusiastic when the narrator describes scenes of past violence with all the dispassionate weariness of a bored museum curator.

When you're presented with yet another simplistic, unchallenging diversion, it's hard not to sympathise with his point of view. ■

PC GAMER 47

◆ **Expect to pay** £17 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Digital Games Factory
◆ **Developer** CBE Software ◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** bit.ly/A5fM9a

HUNTER-DRILLER

The **REALLY BIG SKY**'s the limit in this shooter. ***By Henry Winchester***

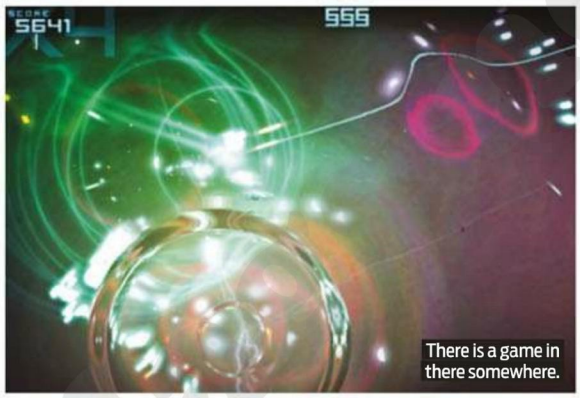
I've just been called a tit by a game. When you die in *Really Big Sky* – and it happens a lot – a voiceover yells "You tiiiiiiit!" He sounds like Mr Bean phoning in a performance from the International Space Station. He can be turned off, but I'm a sucker for punishment.

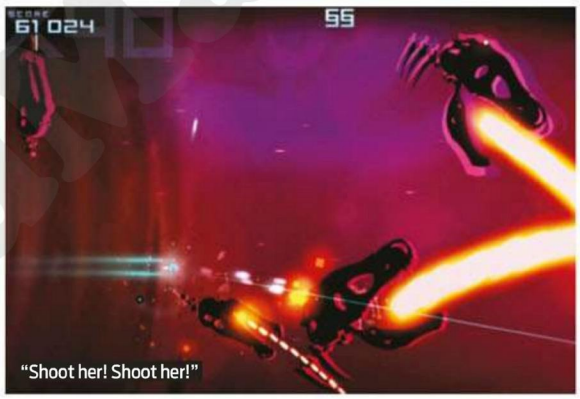
"Twat 'em!" Mr Bean screams at the start of a session. Then the optic nerve overload begins, as the screen is filled with psychedelic 2D enemies, scored with a trancey soundtrack. Respite from the mind-melting visuals is offered by huge planets, where your wee ship must be switched to drill mode to plough your way through. Then a boss appears, and with only a single life per session you die immediately.

The game has only just begun. Rather than spitting you out to a menu screen, you're given an array of weapons and shields to upgrade using your points from the last session. Suddenly, those bosses don't seem so tough, and you're able to carry on playing for more than a few seconds. It's utterly compulsive, exploiting our fundamental human need to level up while looking at bright colours.

That sky is really big, too. The enemies are randomly assigned, meaning you could potentially play the game until the end of time – if you're good enough, and immortal. Every now and then things go utterly mental with fire-breathing dino-skulls – while Mr Bean hums the theme from Jurassic Park – or switching to negative. Add local co-op, a bewildering array of game modes and stats, and some spiffing tunes and you've got one of the smartest indie shoot-'em ups I've played in years. Buy it. You tiiit. ■

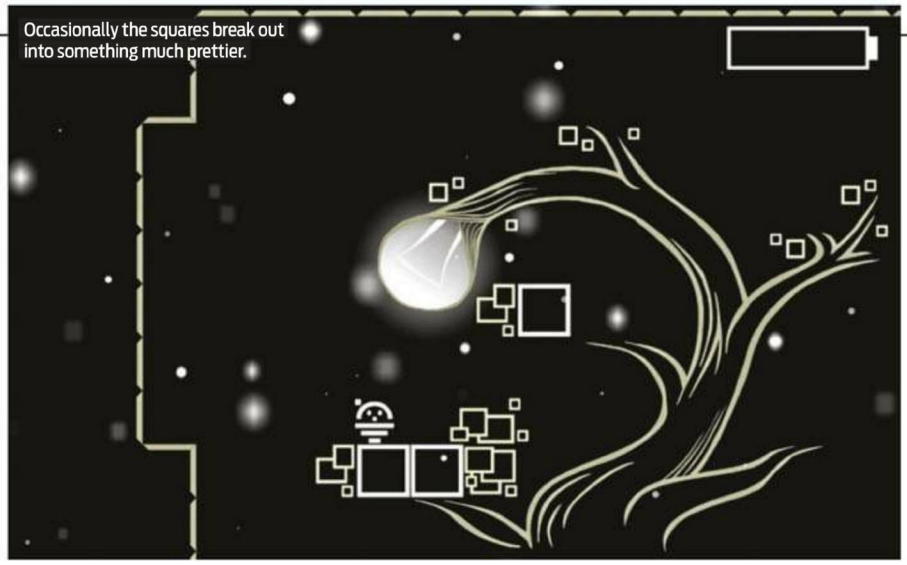
PC GAMER 85

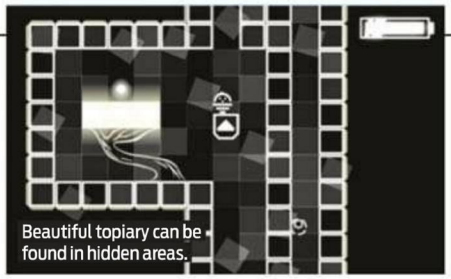




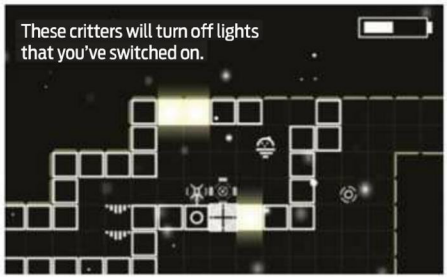
◆ **Expect to pay** £6.99 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Boss Baddie
◆ **Developer** In-house ◆ **Multiplayer** Up to 4 players ◆ **Link** bit.ly/wmjF9T

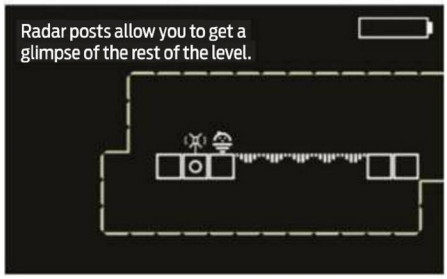
WorldMags.net

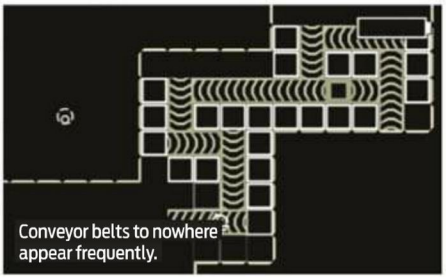

Occasionally the squares break out into something much prettier.


Beautiful topiary can be found in hidden areas.

Much of the game is spent in situations like this.


These critters will turn off lights that you've switched on.


Radar posts allow you to get a glimpse of the rest of the level.


Conveyor belts to nowhere appear frequently.

WATT?

1000 AMPS takes you down the path of most resistance. ***By Duncan Geere***

Need to know

What is it?
A striking, but frustrating, indie platform puzzler.

Influenced by
Metroid, minimalism

Play it on
2GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 6MB HDD, Flash Player 10

Alternatively
Braid, 92%

Copy protection
Steam

If you're a member of the camp of gamers who believe that the answers to puzzles should never be signposted, and that modern games are way too easy, then you're going to like *1000 Amps*.

You play as a cute lil' icon called Plug (no relation to the Bash Street Kid) who is attempting to repair a set of electrical stations called the Amp-Tree-System. In each room, you can light up a number of squares by touching them, and when you've lit them all, that part of the system is repaired. As you light these squares, you're given more power – enabling you to jump and teleport. Most of the puzzles rely on using that gradual increase in power to enable you to access more and more lightsquares in each room.

The art style is minimalist. So minimalist, in fact, that you can't see any of the room you're in until you touch the squares in question. As such, exploration becomes an exercise in feeling around in the dark, unsure if you're about to plunge down a hole into another room entirely, losing all your progress in the current room. That's around the point when *1000 Amps* starts getting a little frustrating.

It continues to frustrate when you come up against seemingly-impossible rooms that have conveyor belts that cart you around against your will, rogue baddies who switch off lights that you've switched on, and jumping puzzles that demand pixel-perfect precision.

It's a defiantly retro path to take, and one that isn't going to please everyone – especially when failure often means trekking back through several past rooms just to have another go. The map gives you some idea of where you're supposed to be going, but it's utterly uninteractive and therefore mostly useless.

The worst moments are when you know exactly what you need to do to solve a room, but can't quite get the timing of the jumps or teleports right, and you find yourself repeating the same move over and over again, hoping that you fluke your way into doing it right. When you do finally manage that, you won't think "Amazing! I am so talented!" – you'll think "Thank God that's over." Then you realise that you have to start essentially from scratch in the next room.

The core idea of powering up your character progressively is a solid one, and there are moments of real beauty in the stark-but-cute art style, but ultimately *1000 Amps* fails by simply not giving the player enough information, forcing a trial-and-error, guesswork-oriented approach to problem solving. That's fine when a game gives you another go instantly, but that's often not an option here.

There is an audience who'll love *1000 Amps*, and the £4 price is excellent value for a puzzle game of this length. But if you prefer your games to be a little more friendly and approachable, then you're going to want to look elsewhere. ■

◆ Expect to pay £3.99 **◆ Release** Out now **◆ Publisher** Self-published **◆ Developer** Brandon Brizzi
◆ Multiplayer None **◆ Link** bit.ly/AxT7sJ

VERDICT

An often frustrating game built around a clever idea. It could have become something so much greater.

PC GAMER 64

WorldMags.net

INERT

CRAZY MACHINE ELEMENTS is missing a few crucial parts. ***By Chris Thursten***

In only a few years, building elaborate contraptions out of in-game physics has burst from its niche to become a celebrated part of PC gaming. *Armadillo Run* punted the ball into the air, *Garry's Mod* caught it and *Minecraft* ran with it. *Crazy Machine Elements* wants to be part of that chain reaction.

It's a puzzle game that sets you up with a mostly-complete contraption and gives you a preset number of parts with which to complete it. The aim is to meet a stage-specific objective: blow up this vase, move that ball, bring these clockwork mice together. Unfortunately, in the majority of cases there's a single optimal way to use the pieces you're given, and you're often only in control of the most boring bits of a given machine.

In one example, a cannon needed to trigger an elaborate chain reaction begins in mid-air and falls as soon as you press play. There's a horizontal platform in your inventory. Guess what you do with it?

The sad thing is that many of these contraptions are fun to watch, and figuring out how they work can be enjoyable, but you're not inventing them yourself. You're limited to finding the missing link in someone else's design, and that prevents the game from reaching its potential.

Things open up as the difficulty level rises, but it's questionable whether pushing through to the challenge mode is worth grinding out 50 trial-and-error solutions. The editor does allow you to build your own machines from scratch, but the lack of a problem to solve leaves this feeling empty. There are better and more rewarding ways to exercise your creativity. ■

PC GAMER 52

Collect all the golden cogs to get the highest rating.

Environmental conditions affect the workings of your machine.

◆ **Expect to pay** £8 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Viva Media ◆ **Developer** Fakt Software ◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** bit.ly/crazymachineelements

CLIMACTIC

Take some risks and you'll be rewarded by **SCOREGASM**. ***By Phil Savage***

Despite the name, this isn't really about gaining a high score. Where most 2D arena shooters are heavily geared towards their leaderboards, *Scoregasm*'s are hidden away in favour of more solitary gratification.

Combos build as you destroy enemies, and plummet when you don't. And you *really* want to keep that combo rising.

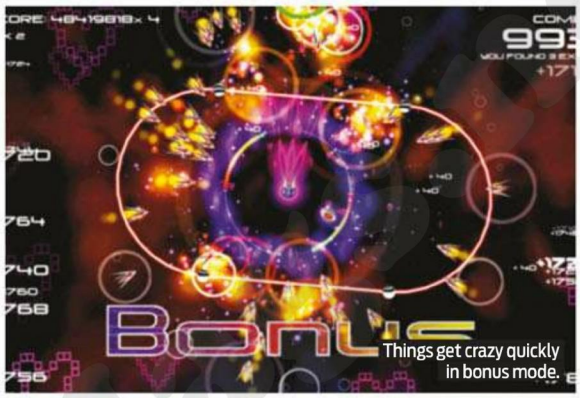
At low level it's an upgrade, granting your ship a triple shot effect and homing missiles, which you'll lose if it dips below the threshold. More importantly, each arena has two combo targets. Achieve both within the time limit and you get a treat: a flood of enemies, bullets, zooming hearts and a pulsating 'Bonus' sign. It's a heady psychedelic reward for your skill and hard work.

Your success also determines your choice of 'gate' to the next level in this non-linear game. Each stage has three variations: you can swap between them at will, but playing a full campaign on the hardest path requires you to consistently hit the highest targets.

Helping you achieve this is your secondary bomb attack. It clears bullets as well as enemies from your immediate area, and raises your combo much faster that shooting alone. As a result, you're encouraged to put yourself in danger, and the more frenzied levels will see you plunge into fields of bullets, hoping to clear as much as possible before the charge on your bomb attack runs out and leaves you stranded.

Scoregasm may lack the polish and extra modes of the best examples of the genre, but its frenetic pace and level variety ensure it's worth more than a quick fumble. ■

PC GAMER 79



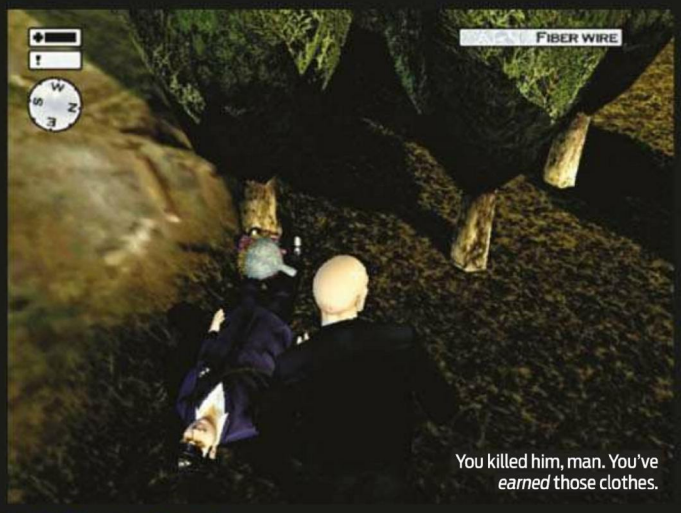
Things get crazy quickly in bonus mode.

There's never a good time for your bomb attack to run out.

◆ **Expect to pay** £7 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** N/A ◆ **Developer** Charlie's Games ◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** bit.ly/wWJ380

WorldMags.net

The cheekbones of a drag queen, the barcode of a packet of Frosties.



You killed him, man. You've *earned* those clothes.

Crouching. The quieter, modern alternative to walking.

Kiss your trees goodbye, there's humans to kill.

Heh. The radar blip thing is going up his nose.

DRESS TO KILL

HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN is Groundhog Day for murderers.

Need to know

What is it?
Dressed To Kill, the videogame

Influenced by
Thief, *Metal Gear Solid*

Play it on
1.8GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, DirectX 7 graphics card

Alternatively
Hitman: Blood Money, 85%

This is how all sequels should start. The hero in retirement. Committed to a life of no longer doing whatever it was that made him suitable fodder for the first videogame. The dramatic irony is unbearable, waiting for the moment that we, the audience, know is going to knock him back into his old life. In the case of glossy-pated death executive Agent 47, that's a life of profitable, crafty sneaking about and contract killing.

But gaming's favourite prime number has turned away from that life, preferring to confess to a priest who offers no evidence of giving a shit, and tend the hydrangeas of the diocese with silent, assassin-like tenderness. He's a gardener with a shed surprisingly light on gardening tools, but with plenty of room for guns. Perhaps his trick with the daffodils is to walk around in March and murder them out of the soil.

Then it happens: the priest gets kidnapped by the mafia. It's off to the mission-giving laptop for 47, to get help from his old employers in return for hits. Incidentally, that laptop was just there, in his shed, open and on. You've got to wonder how committed he was to this whole gardening thing. "Are you getting nostalgic and browsing potential hits, Mr 47? A nun just tripped over your hose and has been telling everyone it was the devil appearing as a snake."

If you're new to the *Hitman* series, it's a mixture of *Metal Gear* stealth and infiltration, with the costume changes of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert. The 20 missions all feel pretty scripted, but this isn't about emergent adventures and overlapping systems. It's about learning the intimate movements of the level, using the options given to you, and enjoying the thrill of satisfaction when you realise the developers knew you were going to do that and gave the game a satisfying response. Think of each level as its own Groundhog Day. Just keep repeating, learning, and eventually you'll live that perfect, *Silent Assassin* day.

Take the first level, Anathema. Getting into the compound, you can knock out or kill a mailman, and steal his clothes and delivery. But there's a frisk check at the compound gate, so you have to get rid of your gun. You're limited in your options by a set of limited context menus. We're all used to creating piles of inventory crap in *Skyrim*, but you can't do something as unusual as 'drop your guns' unless you find an object with an option for stashing them. My inclination to dress up the mailman in my old clothes, plant the gun on him, then grass him up to the compound guards? Non-starter, for similar reasons.

But those limitations are easily trumped by the number of fun ways in which you can, eventually, achieve your mark, and the more you play, the more you're willing to forgive the frayed edges of the illusion. It's worth it.

◆ **Expect to pay** £7 ◆ **Publisher** IO Interactive ◆ **Developer** Square Enix ◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** gog.com
◆ **First review** PCG 114, 71%

VERDICT

Not the best in the series, and archaic-feeling controls. But *Silent Assassin* holds its own in a crowded room.

PC GAMER **77**

WorldMags.net

MULTIMEDIOCRE

THE 7TH GUEST fails to click

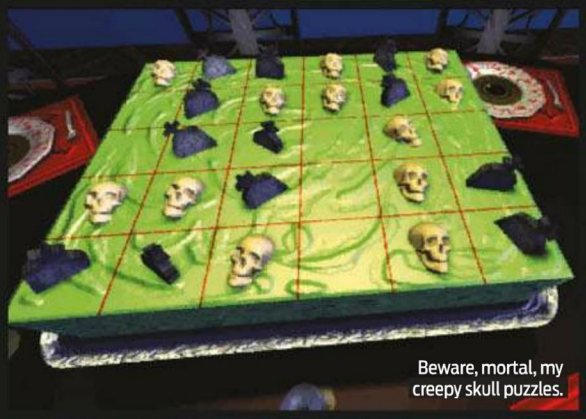
There's going to be a time, maybe 20 years from now, when we'll look back on Adam Sandler movies, and there'll be sufficient distance for us all to think: did we really let that happen? Were we so starved of novelty that we accepted this? What must the industry that produced this shit have thought of us, to think we'd buy it? And didn't I like The Waterboy, before I realised that it wasn't cool to not sneer?

Oh, hello, CD-ROM videogames. I was just thinking about an appropriate analogy for you. Not sure I managed it, to be honest. Anyway, *The 7th Guest* is from the era when 'interactive' was a word worth putting on the front of your game box. A time when our chill thresholds were so low that midi tunes could be considered 'spooky'. But it's not quite part of the Sandler-Schneider mire we find ourselves wading through today. The puzzles are decent enough. It's likeably camp. It's not offensive. It's The Waterboy, not Jack And Jill.

Unfortunately, *The 7th Guest* is powered by a 'pointing' and 'clicking' system that feels like your niece has installed a set of animated novelty cursors she downloaded from a Russian website. A massive, imprecise pyramid indicates clickability, but if you can work out which of the options the huge sod is referring to, then perhaps you won't quit the damn game without saving, more than once, like I did.

If you must have a CD-ROM nostalgia party, there are far worse places to start than this. But for puzzles, try *Nelson Tethers*. ■

PC GAMER 68



Beware, mortal, my creepy skull puzzles.

Tremble at the spooky human heart.

◆ **Expect to pay** £7 ◆ **Publisher** Good Old Games ◆ **Developer** Trilobyte Games ◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** gog.com ◆ **First review** PCG 23, 79%

Boatmaster, your craft is an unlikely one.

SOULBRINGER

Some worlds are created with so much love it feels like a privilege to explore them. This is not one of those games. Its major novelty appears to be a motion-captured combat system. Although you've never seen a low-resolution man stab a vagabond in a more convincingly lifelike fashion, this is not a timeless feature that stands the test of nostalgia.

Most annoyingly, something as fundamental as moving around the world has been made so unpleasantly fernickity that there isn't a proper modern word for it. Well, there might be a better word than fernickity, but once you've thought of the word fernickety, it crowds out all the others. Fernickity. Don't buy this. ■

PC GAMER 58

◆ **Expect to pay** £10 ◆ **Publisher** Good Old Games ◆ **Developer** Interplay ◆ **First review** PCG 84, 63%

Imagine throwing a war party, and only tanks came.

ORDER OF WAR

Look at all those tanks. Like ants at the picnic of war. Like a herd of cannon-trunked RTS elephants. *Order of War* might have a title as forgettable as a wasp fart, but it's as hungry for attention as a writer who relies too heavily on elaborate and self-referential similes. This is a game of noisy set-pieces, desperately trying to keep the attention of the casual crowd it consistently underestimates, like a patronising conversation during a first date with a hot simpleton. The trade-off comes in the tedious combat, which can only be truly communicated by repeating the word 'dull' 150 times. Try it. Stop reading this, and mouth the word 'dull' 150 times. Congratulations! You're reviewing videogames. ■

PC GAMER 45

◆ **Expect to pay** £5 ◆ **Publisher** Mastertronic ◆ **Developer** Square Enix ◆ **First review** PCG 207, 45%

Get a room, guys.

DIVINITY 2: THE DRAGON KNIGHT SAGA

This bundles *Ego Draconis*, and the expansion. I read PC Gamer's first review out of curiosity, and found the perfect summary. "It's not the best fantasy RPG," it read. The original reviewer followed that up with a sentence I've used a few too many times myself, which can be paraphrased as "but if you love doing missions, it's got loads of missions. So knock yourself out, by all means." And I've just enough space to say that the sizey expansion pack is pretty good, and the devs have patched the bugs that made the first game hard work. So the bundle has rocketed upwards, into a whole new cliché. Now, it's good if you like that sort of thing, as it is exactly that sort of thing that you enjoy. ■

PC GAMER 71

◆ **Expect to pay** £30 ◆ **Publisher** Good Old Games ◆ **Developer** Interplay ◆ **First review** PCG 84, 63%

WorldMags.net

NEW ALBUM LIMITED EDITION FANPACK
APOCALYPTIC LOVE

STUNNING NEW ALBUM
+2 BONUS TRACKS

FANPACK INCLUDES:

132 PAGE MAGAZINE

POSTER & PIN BADGE

ON SALE 21 MAY

Pre-order now at:
www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/slash-fan-pack
to receive your exclusive keyring

WorldMags.net

The Hard Stuff

YOUR ESSENTIAL PC GAMER GUIDE TO HARDWARE

BUYER'S ADVICE

MONITORS

Scoping a new screen? PC Gamer can help. ***By Adam Oxford***

Visit www.techradar.co.uk/reviews to find the latest, best prices

DICTIONARY

CRT > Cathode Ray Tube. The old analogue screens, drawn on by the firing of internal electron guns.

LCD > Liquid Crystal Display. A monochrome layer of liquid crystals that block or allow light to pass through individual sites.

LED > Light Emitting Diode. Low power lighting used in newer LCD screens to reduce running costs and make thinner designs.

Display Ratio > The length of a screen compared to its height. Common ratios are 4:3 (old fashioned CRT and iPad), 16:10 (PC widescreen, now rare), and 16:9 (widescreen TV sizes such as 720p and 1080p HD).

Still using that crusty old CRT or early 19-inch LCD screen with washed-out colours and a 4:3 display ratio? With monitor prices apparently in freefall there's really no excuse not to get something a little more modern. You won't regret it: it's the single best way to make your games look better.

Pin-sharp, widescreen resolutions with punchy pixels and vivid colours can all be yours. Just read on.

What should I look for?

If you don't use many computers in your daily life, you may not be aware of the fact that picture quality varies widely from monitor to monitor. A good monitor will have a wide dynamic range of colours and be capable of displaying bright whites and dark blacks, with rich tones between. The trouble is that you can't read this off the specs sheet – all screens will claim they can show in excess of 16million colours. The important thing is which 16 million colours those are.

There are more than 16 million colours?

Just as your eyes aren't capable of seeing infrared or ultraviolet, no monitors can display every single colour in the visible sections of the electromagnetic spectrum. To help keep things manageable, we split up the total number of colours possible into subsections called 'gamuts'. A good indicator of monitor quality is to look at the amount of the AdobeRGB colour gamut that it can display, usually expressed as a percentage. Above 70-odd% is good, but the best new wide-gamut screens can actually display 10-15% more colours than are defined in the AdobeRGB specs.

Which type of screen has the best picture quality?

There are four types of screen technology currently available, TN, VA (including MVA and PVA), IPS and OLED. Of these, VA is increasingly rare and OLED is extraordinarily expensive, so you'll find the choice is between TN and IPS. IPS screens have better looking and more accurate colours, a wider dynamic range and broader viewing angles. TN screens have a faster response time, which means individual pixels change state more quickly, and are thus less liable to ghosting. It used to be the case that IPS screens were more expensive, but newer e-IPS panels are just as cheap as TN screens. They're not quite as good as older IPS technologies, mind, as they produce some colours through dithering.

What's dithering?

Say you want a light blue pixel, but your monitor can't display that particular shade, you could use a slightly darker blue and 'mix' it with white. The mixing process involves flickering between the dark blue and white tones so rapidly the eye blends them together. That's dithering.

Can the human eye actually see ghosting on an 8ms screen?

Quoted response times tend to be best case scenarios. So a 2ms monitor might actually take 8ms to change state between certain shades, and an 8ms screen might take 20ms for the same operation. Given that your eye can detect changes that are slower than about 10ms, on a 5ms screen you might well run the risk of the occasional bit of motion blur. I would rather take that and higher image quality of an IPS monitor – but you might value speed over looks.

Is that the same as input lag?

No –input lag is the time it take to do something (like fire a gun) and see that action happen on screen. It can be off-putting, but just as ghosting is overplayed as a problem by a lot of people, so input lag isn't that much of an issue these days. ■

WorldMags.net

GROUP TEST

LED MONITORS

The latest LED screens are thin, low power and great performers too.

By Adam Oxford

HOW WE TESTED

Colour accuracy > The most important tests are the basic image quality ones. Using a combination of cameras, calibration devices and the pages at *lagom.nl*, we looked for rich colours, brightness and overall dynamic range.

Gaming and ghosts > No LCD panel should exhibit noticeable ghosting in games any more, it's just inexcusable. We also looked for signs of input lag that would obviously slow us down.

Build quality> With professional monitors now out for less than £200, all screens should come with a fully height adjustable stand unless there's a convincing aesthetic reason not to.

Price > Pity the poor monitor manufacturers - it's a cutthroat business these days. You can get excellent quality for under £150. Why pay more?

Visit www.techradar.co.uk/reviews to find the latest, best prices.

i2353Fh

£138 AOC

PC GAMER EDITOR'S CHOICE ★★★★★

Picking a winner out of this group test depends on many, largely subjective things. If you want a top-of-the-range monitor with an industrial stand and a screen size of 24 inches or above, AOC's i2353 isn't what you're after. If you want stereoscopic 3D and 120Hz refresh rates, look elsewhere too.

If, on the other hand, you want outstanding image quality in a monitor that's so thin it's almost invisible in profile, that sips power and is ludicrously cheap, this is exactly what you've been looking for.

The i2353Fh has an e-IPS panel, which means it has rich colour

"Beautiful colours, beautiful price and the thinnest screen on test here"

quality and excellent viewing angles, and is as happy editing photos as it is gaming. The picture quality is so good, in fact, I'd take it over the larger Dell U2412M opposite, despite all the seeming advantages that screen has. It may not have a height adjustable base or rotate through 90 degrees for portrait orientation, but it's great by any other metric.

Even the 5ms response time is above average for an IPS-based panel, and unless you're playing FPS games professionally, I challenge you to spot any difference in terms of motion blur or ghosting between this and the fastest screens available.

There's even a tiny speaker buried in the base, along with a headphone socket and two HDMI ports. There's no DVI in, which is a shame, but I had no problems getting a crisp picture using the scaling options in the graphics card drivers.

The more I use it, in fact, the more I like it. The touch-sensitive controls on the base bring up a sensible and easy to navigate menu, and there's even an sRGB mode which is lacking in some more expensive screens.

What's more, it even looks better than its predecessor, the downmarket i2352vh. With an aluminium surround and faux metal base the i2353Fh won't fool anyone for long, but it does at least suggest thoughtfulness and class when sitting in the corner of the room.

While 24 inches and a proper PC 16:10 resolution would certainly make it better, there is one thing I'd really have liked to have seen done differently: because the controls and inputs are built into the base, there's no VESA mount round the back to add a better third party stand or attach it to a specialised multi-monitor mount. Otherwise, at this price, I'd take two or three of these monitors and have a crack at surround-screen gaming.

That really is the sum of its sins. Beautiful colours, beautiful price and the thinnest screen on test here: an excellent all-rounder. ■

VERDICT

Super-thin and low power with glorious colours and a ridiculously low price. Hard to fault.

PC GAMER **94**

SPEC ◆ Screen size 23" **◆ Resolution** 1920x1080 **◆ Panel tech** e-IPS **◆ Response time** 5ms **◆ Contrast ratio** 1000:1 **◆ Colour gamut** 96.9% sRGB **◆ Backlight** LED **◆ Inputs** 2xHDMI, 1xVGA **◆ Power consumption** 32W **◆ Dimensions** 549x388x187mm

WorldMags.net

U2412M

£230 Dell

One of a dying breed, the most important thing about Dell's 24-inch U2412M is that it stretches that diagonal measurement over a proper computer resolution of 1920x1200 pixels. That's only 120 more vertical pixels than the more common video-friendly 1920x1080, but they make a substantial difference when reading text documents, browsing the web or working out who's shooting you from above in *Battlefield 3*.

It's also an IPS panel with a fully professional stand for a very reasonable price. I can attest to the build quality personally, having dropped one of these down a flight of stairs without damaging it.

So, even though it's the newer e-IPS type, which relies on dithering to take 6-bit colour up to 8-bits, it should still be a must buy, right? Actually, when you turn it on the U2412M is mildly disappointing. The colours look bland and the default gamma settings are way out. The anti-glare coating doesn't help, being laid on so thick it mutes the picture, but most of the problems are down to dodgy factory settings. If you have the time and the patience, properly calibrating the U2412M can transform it. It takes some work, and preferably a hardware sensor too.

Surprisingly, given its professional credentials, there's no sRGB mode in the basic settings either, although there are adjustments for media and gaming. It's no great loss – manually calibrating a monitor will always give better results. There is a handy four-port USB hub on the side, however.

With the picture corrected, you can appreciate the rich blacks and the massive viewing angles, along with that lovely 16:10 aspect ratio. The built-in power supply makes the Dell one of the deeper monitors on test here, but the LED backlight still keeps the power consumption down.

You'll have worked out by now that I have no problem recommending an IPS monitor for gaming. The 8ms response time might seem high, but you have to look hard to see evidence of ghosting and input lag is as low as any of the screens here.

So the U2412M is a good monitor, but it requires fine tuning. The main reason to buy it is that old school widescreen ratio, which should have made it a clear winner, but it's not quite as good as I'd hoped. ■

VERDICT

Not quite the killer screen it should have been, but a fine monitor, especially if you take the time to tune it.

PC GAMER **82**

SPEC ◆ **Screen size** 24" ◆ **Resolution** 1920x1080 ◆ **Panel tech** e-IPS ◆ **Response time** 8ms ◆ **Contrast ratio** 1000:1 ◆ **Colour gamut** 95.8% sRGB ◆ **Backlight** LED ◆ **Inputs** DVI, VGA, DisplayPort, USB ◆ **Power consumption** 29W ◆ **Dimensions** 556x513x190mm

Brilliance Moda 248C3LH

£193 Philips

It doesn't quite have the design flair of the Acer overleaf, but Philips' Brilliance Moda 248C3LH is still very much a looker. More at home in an office reception than a grubby gaming den, it's not as thin as the AOC which wins this round-up, but is more desirable in every other way. And it's available in both white and black, depending on your taste.

For all that, the Brilliance is still a relatively expensive TN panel in what is rapidly becoming an IPS world. And while that hollow halo of a stand looks great, does it lift up or spin round for your viewing comfort? It does not.

Nevertheless, of all the sub-£200 TN screens I've seen recently, the Philips Moda is just about my favourite. The colours are good – second only to the considerably more expensive BenQ for this type of screen – and the viewing angles aren't bad either. Staring straight on, there's little of the washed out distortion at the edges of the panel which is common with these screens, and text is sharp and readable too.

If you're one of the people who genuinely has problems with image ghosting on slower IPS screens, this is a close enough second in terms of picture quality to be worth investing your money in.

Once it's up and running, there's a lot of fancy frippery in the various settings. A lot of monitors nowadays come with some gimmicky image enhancements, and although the Philips has more than most none of them proved particularly useful. The best overall look comes from switching it to the factory-calibrated sRGB setting and leaving it there.

If you absolutely have to have a faster TN screen, the Brilliance is a very good one to go for. But it's hard to fully recommend it when there's much better image quality available for less, and IPS screens with professional stands are available for not a lot more. ■

VERDICT

Good picture quality and fast, but Philips' Brilliance is up against a lot of very worthy competition.

PC GAMER **82**

SPEC ◆ **Screen size** 23.6" ◆ **Resolution** 1920x1080 ◆ **Panel tech** TN ◆ **Response time** 2ms ◆ **Contrast ratio** 1000:1 ◆ **Colour gamut** N/A ◆ **Backlight** W-LED ◆ **Inputs** 2xHDMI, VGA ◆ **Power consumption** 22W ◆ **Dimensions** 579x443x194mm

WorldMags.net

Syncmaster S27A850d

£550 Samsung

As much as I like multi-monitor gaming, I'd rather have one good 27-inch screen like this than two 24 inchers. There's plenty of width in a large panel to fill my peripheral vision, thanks.

Trading up from a 24" screen has other benefits too, but many cheap 27 inchers are stuck with 1080p resolutions: pixels so big that every game looks like *Minecraft*. The fact that Samsung's S27A850 has a pin-sharp 2560x1440 resolution perfectly suited to its size isn't what makes it special, though. It's that this is the first monitor to use the same Super PLS technology that Samsung fit into their richly coloured tablets.

Technically, PLS is most similar to IPS in terms of the way it works, but the actual result is punchier colours, richer blacks, brighter whites and exceptionally smooth text. Professional photographers won't be interested in its all-too vivid hues, but for gaming it's great, especially if you want everything you play to gain a warm, *Warcraft*-friendly glow.

It also has a faster response rate than most IPS screens. Its 5ms grey to grey time is impressive for a large screen of any type.

The stand is solid and flexible, there's a USB 3.0 hub built in, and the monitor is thin, too. There's even a fitting around the back to hold the external power supply out of the way.

The ability to look at two computer outputs side by side will please coders, but I had problems with both dual link DVI connections, as they refused to work above 50% resolution. To get Windows working across the whole display I has to use a DisplayPort lead, although I'm sure this was a fault on the review sample.

The viewing angles are noticeably narrower than on the U2412M, resulting in colours that distort at the edges of the screen. And there's that price – it's only just cheaper than Dell's 2709W and HP's excellent ZR2740w, and Hazro's HZ27WC is available for less than £500 if you shop around.

For its punchy colours and high speed hub, the Samsung is a great first outing for the PLS panels. But if you prefer tonal accuracy to highly saturated shine, you'll stick with the older, cheaper, trusted IPS tech. ■

VERDICT

Fast response times and vibrant colours, but a little too saturated for all tastes. Not quite the best value 27" around.

PC GAMER **85**

SPEC ◆ **Screen size** 27" ◆ **Resolution** 2560x1440 ◆ **Panel tech** PLS ◆ **Response time** 5ms ◆ **Contrast ratio** 1000:1 ◆ **Colour gamut** 100% ◆ **Backlight** LED ◆ **Inputs** 2xDVI, DisplayPort, USB 3.0 ◆ **Power consumption** 50W ◆ **Dimensions** 642x442x224mm

BenQ XL2420T

£380 BenQ

There's only one thing that could justify a 24" TN panel coming close to £400. BenQ's XL2420T is the second monitor we've seen to feature Nvidia's 3D Vision 2 technology.

Megabucks buy you a megafast 120Hz refresh rate, which is good for stereoscopic gaming, but even better for rock solid picture quality in high speed scenes. It also brings a host of enhancements over traditional TN panels in terms of contrast and general image looks. The XL2420T can't touch IPS for quality, and next to Samsung's S27A850 it's a pale imitation of colour, but it is rich and vivid enough to be worth a look. It even has decent viewing angles for a TN screen.

Quite rightly, though, BenQ have played down its 3D credentials, and declined to include a pair of active shutter glasses. At the price, that might seem stingy, but gaming goggles are already looking like a spent fad. Instead BenQ have collaborated with pro-gaming teams to get downloadable colour profiles for specific games. No less of a gimmick, perhaps, but the heart is in the right place.

The extra bit you do get is a USB dongle which controls the on-screen display, with four option buttons and a mouse wheel for altering the monitor settings. It's a welcome novelty, even if it doesn't quite make up for the absence of some essential settings, like an sRGB mode.

There's a USB hub, as well as a large range of inputs including two HDMI sockets, dual link DVI and DisplayPort. If I were forced to choose my favourite thing about the XL2420T, though, it would be the stand. It's the best I think I've ever seen, with an enormous height range and adjustable in every direction you could want.

Personally, I'd take an IPS screen or Samsung's PLS tech any day, but if you must have the speed of a TN alternative, this is what you want. ■

VERDICT

One of the best TN screens around, but really only worth it if you absolutely must have 120Hz speed.

PC GAMER **78**

SPEC ◆ **Screen size** 24" ◆ **Resolution** 1920x1080 ◆ **Panel tech** TN ◆ **Response time** 2ms ◆ **Contrast ratio** 1000:1 ◆ **Colour gamut** 72%NTSC ◆ **Backlight** W-LED ◆ **Inputs** VGA, DVI, 2XHDMI, DisplayPort ◆ **Power consumption** 21W ◆ **Dimensions** 571x516x149mm

WorldMags.net

S243HL

£185 Acer

Fortunately for monitor manufacturers we're usually too engrossed with what's on screen to pay much attention to what's above, below and to the side of it. LED lighting has meant thinner cases of late, but little else has changed in monitor fashion in the last ten years or so.

Acer's S243HL, then, is the proverbial breath of untainted atmosphere. Asymmetrical design and a metal base make up for the fact that the stand isn't height adjustable. It rises comfortably off the desk to a reasonable height and meets you square on with its gorgeously thin but large 24-inch panel.

And it's not expensive, either, for a 24 incher. Less than £200 and you get two HDMI ins as well as a VGA port and headphone socket. Text is clear and the menu controls are cleverly concealed in the off-centre stalk. It also has huge viewing angles for a TN panel.

Unfortunately, Acer hasn't quite nailed the rest of the image quality here. The default gamma setting is slightly off the 2.2 norm, which doesn't help with the apparent lack of dynamic range. But even properly calibrated the colours look pale compared to the better screens in this test. Indeed, the colour range is so poor that several of the grey shades on the PC Gamer website become invisible.

To its credit, the S243HL is very power efficient, winning the prize for green consumption by several watts. But as carbon neutral as I try to be, that's not enough to recommend it for use with a games PC. ■

PC GAMER **68**

SPEC ◆ **Screen size** 24" ◆ **Resolution** 1920x1080 ◆ **Panel tech** TN ◆ **Response time** 2ms ◆ **Contrast ratio** 1000:1 ◆ **Colour gamut** 68%NTSC ◆ **Backlight** LED ◆ **Inputs** 2xHDMI, 1xVGA ◆ **Power consumption** 17W ◆ **Dimensions** 569x425x192mm

Viewsonic VX2453mh-LED

£156 Viewsonic

Not even the most expensive TN screens can match the ultra-cheap AOC i2353Fh on the first page for picture quality, so presumably the only reason you'd choose a cheap one like the Viewsonic VX2455mh-LED is because you get a bit more screen room and faster response rates.

Not a convincing argument, unfortunately. Try as I might, I couldn't get even reasonable picture quality out of the VX2453mh-LED. It resolutely refused to scale the desktop properly over HDMI, leaving text blurry and hard to read.

Even with perfect matching, though, the dynamic range and viewing angles are so much lower than the cheaper i2353Fh that if you put them side by side, you'd swear you were playing a different game. It's not as bad as the TN panels of yore, but it's not up to the competition of today.

It's a surprise. Viewsonic make some excellent screens with LED backlighting – their VP2365 is a prime example. But sadly this isn't one of them. ■

PC GAMER **54**

SPEC ◆ **Screen size** 24" ◆ **Resolution** 1920x1080 ◆ **Panel tech** TN ◆ **Response time** 2ms ◆ **Contrast ratio** 1000:1 ◆ **Colour gamut** 91% sRGB ◆ **Backlight** LED ◆ **Inputs** 2xHDMI ◆ **Power consumption** 19W ◆ **Dimensions** 574x229x195mm

BENCHMARKS

WHICH MONITORS FROM OUR ROUND-UP ARE THE FASTEST AND CHEAPEST TO RUN?

Compared: grey to grey response times as listed by the manufacturer, and measured power consumption.

Power consumption

Response time (lower is better)

AOC I2353FH

Power consumption: 32W

Response time: 5ms

DELL U2412M

Power consumption: 29W

Response time: 8ms

PHILIPS BRILLIANCE MODA 248C3LH

Power consumption: 22W

Response time: 2ms

SAMSUNG SYNCMASTER S27A850D

Power consumption: 50W

Response time: 5ms

BENQ XL2420T

Power consumption: 21W

Response time: 2ms

ACER S243HL

Power consumption: 17W

Response time: 2ms

VIEWSONIC VX2453MH-LED

Power consumption: 19W

Response time: 2ms

WorldMags.net

ON TEST

REVIEWS

The very best in PC gaming hardware, reviewed and rated. ***By Adam Oxford***

TESTING CRITERIA

Components and materials > A piece of kit is quite literally the sum of its parts. We look for the fastest chips, the highest core counts and the most modern materials.

Real-world performance> Each piece of kit we look at must be examined on its own merits. If it's a mouse, how does it feel? Is it too heavy or light? If it's a memory stick, an item designed for portability, how much data can it hold? Does it read and write data quickly?

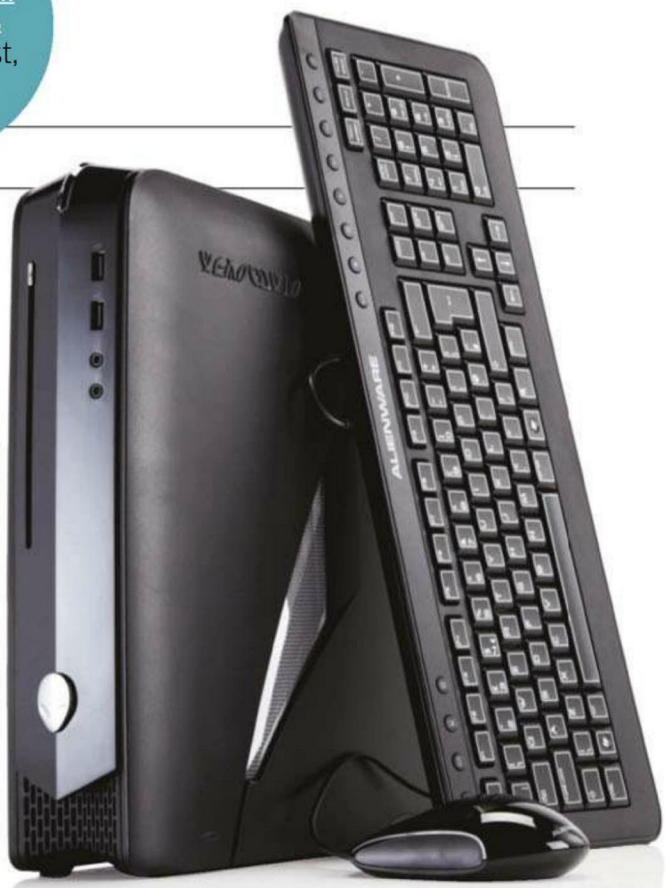
Attractiveness> Some kit looks good, some looks bad. Aesthetics are often taken into account as, depending on the item, it can be a factor in your long-term satisfaction.

Value> It may be the highest-performing piece of kit in its category, but is it within reach of most consumers? We like to see components that are not only best-in-class, but offer value for money too.

Visit www.techradar.co.uk/reviews to find the latest, best prices.

X51

£849 Alienware



One of the more controversial hardware launches of our time, there's been much opprobrium flung in the direction of Alienware's console-sized X51 PC since it was announced back in January.

The key complaint is the graphics. Available with either a GeForce GT 550 or GTX 555 (as our review sample was) it's easy to write the whole thing off as overpriced and overdesigned. But when you total up all the components inside, it isn't actually terrible value for money. You could build it cheaper, obviously, but there's a small premium for the ability to squash all these components together in a box that's only slightly larger than a DVD player. Which is, in my opinion, worthwhile.

"I was sceptical, but after playing with the X51 I think Alienware have got it just right"

The custom case is compact, but the airflow still pretty good. For the most part, the X51 runs more quietly than an Xbox 360. The external power supply means you need fewer fans to vent the tiny chassis, and these only kick in when you've been gaming for a while in any case.

As much as I could see the X51 being an ideal console replacement, however, I'm not sure that's where it will end up being most used. And that's not because it looks too cheesy for the lounge – the glossy plastic front is perhaps not as elegant as it could be, but it's actually quite a discrete, cleverly made machine. The LEDs can be muted, and even the alien head logo swivels depending on whether the PC is laid flat or mounted upright. No, the problem is that it's wasted as a media centre. There are numerous other options involving streamers, NAS drives or laptops that just make a bit more sense to me.

I still think the X51 will be a success, because it's a great little desktop capable of very respectable framerates. I was sceptical of the performance initially, but after playing with it I think Alienware have got it just right. The GTX 555 is capable of running everything at 1080p, albeit with a few options turned off. *Shogun 2*, for example, runs at over 60fps with default 'High' settings and anti-aliasing turned off. *Battlefield 3* hits the same number of frames per second at HDTV resolutions with graphics set to medium settings.

So yes, you can build cheaper and you can build faster, and you can get machines for the same price that will make your games look that little bit better. But for the unique design of the X51 and the hope that non-gamers will buy it and be encouraged to enjoy it, I'm going to say that it's won me over. The best analogy I can think of is that it's like an iPhone or iPad – I wouldn't buy one, I'd be frustrated by their limitations. But I know a lot of people for whom I think it's a sensible investment. ■

VERDICT

An underspecced machine for demanding gamers, but a well designed all-rounder for everyone else.

PC GAMER **85**

SPEC ◆ CPU Core i5 2320 (3GHz) ◆ **Memory** 8GB ◆ **Graphics** GTX 555 ◆ **Storage** 1TB ◆ **Optical drive** DVD-RW ◆ **Power supply** 330W ◆ **Power use** 68W (Idle) 165W (Peak) ◆ **Ports** 2xDVI, HDMI, mini-HDMI, 7.1 audio, headphones, optical audio, mic (front and rear), 8xUSB ◆ **Networking** Ethernet, WiFi ◆ **Size** 343x318x95mm, 5.49kg

WorldMags.net

Steelseries SRW-S1

£99 Steelseries

This console-inspired motion controller uses internal gyros to work out whether you're turning left or right. You wield it in your hands, unsupported by any deskbound attachment.

It's as comfortable to use as a gamepad, and thanks to a wired USB connection, as sensitive as a 'proper' wheel when it comes to driving a car. And when you're not using it, it'll sit in even the smallest of drawers.

All those buttons are configured primarily to work with the online racer *Simraceway*, which is an odd choice since the game itself is far from the best driving experience out there. Mostly, though, you'll only need a few of those buttons mapped to specific in-game controls.

There's obviously no force feedback, which is an issue for serious simheads. The big problem I found, however, was with the paddles. There are no foot pedals, so you're reliant on these to accelerate and brake.

That setup works if you're using a controller and D-pad, but the whole device is just too big and spaced out even for my averagely sized mitts. Trying to hold down the brake paddle while changing gear, turning a corner and tapping one of the central buttons to apply handbrake to slide out, becomes a challenge of hand-to-eye coordination.

It's a shame, because the SRW-S1 is otherwise a well built wheel. At just half an inch smaller it might have been a winner, but at £99 you're better off with either a mid-range wheel or a gamepad. ■

PC GAMER 58

SPEC ◆ **Buttons** 15 programmable, 3 dials, 2 analogue paddles, 2 gear shift paddles ◆ **On the fly adjustments** Brake balance, driving aids, steering sensitivity ◆ **Y-Axis** Motion controlled gyro ◆ **Dimensions** 153x235x70mm

Steelseries 6Gv2

£65 www.steelseries.com

This pared back and basic keyboard is redolent of early IBM desktops – and absolutely ideal for gaming.

It's the kind of keyboard the Amish would use if they were allowed to play *Tribes: Ascend*. No USB hub, no headphone extension. It doesn't even have those little legs at the back. The only slight flair of imagination is in moving the Windows key to the right side of the spacebar to make way for a special function button that enables the media playback shortcuts. It's as Spartan as they come.

And it's wonderful. Underneath each keycaps is a mechanical Cherry MX Black switch. These fast, non-tactile buttons don't have the click-into-place feel of the Cherry MX Browns which appear in Razer's Black Widow, but neither are they as hair-trigger happy as the Reds in Corsair and QPAD's range. It's a happy middle ground that makes each key slightly weighty – helping to prevent accidental presses – but still ready to fire off fast when you need it and bounce back into position extraordinarily quickly when done.

PC GAMER EDITOR'S CHOICE ★★★★★

The overall build quality is excellent. Not flashy, but tightly designed and compact with an overall weight that makes it very stable.

The right shift key is a little small and tricky to hit, and there's no wrist rest to make typing as comfortable as gaming. Nor does it live up the claims of full anti-ghosting – but then neither do many USB keyboards. This is an excellent option for those who want top quality but can't afford the higher priced designs. ■

PC GAMER 93

SPEC ◆ **Keys** 104 ◆ **Key type** Cherry MX Black Linear ◆ **Actuation** 60g ◆ **Material** Iron infused plastic ◆ **Connection** USB/PS2 ◆ **Antighosting** 6KRO(USB) NKRO(PS2) ◆ **Size** 546x320x84mm ◆ **Weight** 1.8kg

KIT FILTER

Sennheiser RS120 II £80

On sound quality alone, I wouldn't rate the RS120s: they're good, but severely lacking in bass response and with a tendency to distort when turned up loud. As a wireless kit, though, they're elegantly designed with a simple charger-cum-stand and enough convenience that it's easy to forgive a few flaws. The only real problem is that if you leave them on your head after quitting a game, you're likely to get a blast of close range static when the transmitter drops into standby.

PC GAMER 80

www.sennheiser.com

Razer Naga Hex £80

A multi-button MMO mouse like this might be useful for firing off lots of spells, but the high probability of mis-hitting one of the tiny keys beneath the thumb is likely to slow you down to the point that any advantage is lost. If you do have especially dextrous digits, this new version is probably the best of the multi-button mice so far. It reduces the number of thumb buttons to just six, and spaces them out so that even a clumsy oaf can find the right one by touch.

PC GAMER 72

www.razerzone.com

Steelseries Kana £35

This new mouse fits neatly between the tiny Kinzu and larger Sensei, and has much in common with both. A tough braided cord, 3200dpi resolution and ambidextrous design are all good, as is the fact it's lightweight and low – which works for those with smaller, gentler paws. The glossy plastic finish doesn't exactly scream quality, but it is – as they say – priced to sell. I still maintain the original Ikari was the best mouse Steelseries made, however.

PC GAMER 78

www.steelseries.co.uk

WorldMags.net

The PC Gamer Rig

Once you've built it, let them come

Want to know what components I'd buy if I were putting together a new PC? Of course you don't. That would elicit only negative emotions from your heart. Either you would be crippled by envy of my phenomenal framerates, or you'd mock my pathetic indulgences and never trust a word I wrote again.

What you want is a PC which doesn't cost too much but can handle any game you care to throw at it in 1920x1080 resolution. A PC which cost less than £1,000 and yet performs like a million. A PC, in other words, like the PC Gamer Rig.

It's an all rounder, a PC for the average boy or girl. Solid, sensible but with enough character and flair to be a favourite for the coming years. If you're prepared to get inside the BIOS and overclock it slightly, it'll easily compete with machines costing twice the price.

Updated weekly so that it's always the best value that it can possibly be, the PC Gamer Rig currently looks like this. There's just one word of caution, though. Nvidia's forthcoming Kepler graphics cards are about to do a leg sweep on the towering giant of GPU prices which have remained almost unchanged for over a year. Not before time, obviously. ■

Adam

Adam Oxford
Hardware Editor

WHAT'S IN THE BOX

£161

CPU
Intel Core i5 2500K

An unlocked Sandy Bridge quad core, with everything but hyperthreading included.
FITTED November

£72

MOTHERBOARD
Gigabyte Z68AP-D3

An awesome Z68 board, with mSATA connectors for mini SSDs and Intel's caching technology.
FITTED November

£38

RAM
Crucial Ballistic Sport

Eight gigabytes of fast 1600MHz DDR3 for under £50. Grab it quick, just in case it's a misprint.
FITTED November

£75

CASE
Corsair Carbide 500R

An excellent case, quiet, classy and roomy. It's as good as many that cost twice the price or more.
FITTED March

£100

HARD DRIVE
Seagate Barracuda 2TB

They're still not quite as cheap as they were last year, but 2TB for £100 is a good deal.
FITTED May

£17

DVD DRIVE
LG GH22NP21

Fast DVD writers are pretty generic these days, and it's not really worth spending the extra for Blu-ray.
FITTED November

£170

3D CARD
GeForce GTX 560Ti

A good low cost card that'll get you gaming at decent framerates on a single monitor.
FITTED January

£70

POWER SUPPLY
Cooler Master 80+

A decent 650W PSU that's rated well for efficiency. The minimum you should try to get away with.
FITTED November

£138

MONITOR
AOC i2353Fh

Spectacular quality for gamers, easily beating screens that cost twice as much.
FITTED May

£60

KEYBOARD
SteelSeries 6Gv2

Will last forever, fully mechanical and absolutely brilliant. Well worth spending more for.
FITTED May

£30

MOUSE
Logitech G400

Classic Logitech style in a brand new design, this 3600dpi mouse is comfortable and precise.
FITTED November

£34

HEADSET
Corsair HS1A

Good quality sound at a reasonable price. Easily one of the best sub-£50 headsets.
FITTED November

WHAT'S NEW AND WHY

Hard drive > The best advice is to hold on for a few more weeks if you can, but there are some reasonably priced drives around now. Like the Barracuda above.

Monitor > Balancing picture quality with cost used to be tricky, but cheap eIPS panels like this one puts paid to all that. Stand is a bit rubbish though.

Keyboard > Not everyone will want to buy a mechanical keyboard, but considering you'd only save £30 by going for a decent lesser one, this seems like the investment for the future.

TOTAL PRICE £965

WorldMags.net

Chillblast.com

sales@chillblast.com 0845 45678 31

ASUS®
Inspiring Innovation • Persistent Perfection

THE WORLD'S FASTEST PCs

40% Faster than Apple equivalent!
The UK's best pricing on performance PCs!
Expert Advice from the UK's most awarded firm!

Powered by ASUS
uk.asus.com

Chillblast PCs are now available with the world's fastest video card, the Radeon 7970!!

PC PRO RECOMMENDED

Fusion Marine

Incredible value for money 7970 PC!

- Core i5 2500K CPU @ 4.8GHz!
- Asus P8Z68 USB3 Motherboard
- Radeon 7970 3GB Graphics Card
- 8GB DDR3 Memory
- Blu Ray / DVD-RW Combi Drive
- Corsair Carbide 400R Case
- 1000GB Hard Disk with SSD Cache
- Windows 7 Home Premium 64 bit
- Corsair CPU Cooler
- 600watt Xigmatek PSU
- 92% in PC Gamer magazine!
- 2 year collect and return warranty with lifetime support

Just £1139 inc. VAT

PC GAMER 92

Fusion Elixir

Our best value gaming system!

- Core i5 2500K CPU @ 4.8GHz!
- Asus P8Z68-V LE USB3 Motherboard
- Radeon 6950 1GB Graphics Card
- 8GB DDR3 Memory
- Sony 24x DVD-RW Drive
- EZCool A200D Case
- 1000GB Hard Disk
- Windows 7 Home Premium 64 bit
- Arctic Cooling Freezer 7 Pro
- 650watt EZCool PSU
- Fully Customisable!
- 2 year collect and return warranty with lifetime support

Just £599 inc. VAT

Claim your free copy of Mafia 2 with any purchase, just quote code PCGAMER0312MAF when ordering!

Buy From the UK's Best!

But don't just take our word for it...

- 2 time PC Pro Excellence Award Winner
- PC Advisor's Top Desktop Brand 2011
- Over 150 Review Awards 2010-2011

WINNER 2011 PC ADVISOR AWARDS

PC PRO 2010 DESKTOP PC AWARD

WorldMags.net

Terms and conditions are on the website. All trademarks are acknowledged. Pictures are for illustration only. Prices are correct at time of going to press (13/01/12). E&OE.

Metro: lots of brightly coloured tiles and very, very small writing.

Welcome to Windows 8

The public beta of Windows 8, called the Consumer Preview, is ready for download. What does it mean for PC gaming?

On the very last day of February, in celebration of the leap year, Microsoft made PC owners a proposal it was hard to resist. It put the Windows 8 Consumer Preview up for download, for free. Within a day, a million people had grabbed it to see what it was like.

You probably know this already. The download page has more than five million Facebook 'likes', and it was headline news around the world. Justifiably so, since Windows 8 is the most dramatic overhaul of the operating system since 1995. Windows 8 is, unavoidably, the shape of the future. When it goes on sale it will be your only OS choice to buy with a new PC.

The easiest way to describe Windows 8 would be as a hybrid mobile/desktop operating system. Just as Apple is doing with OS X, albeit more gradually, Microsoft is betting that mobile devices – whether they are tablets, laptops or smartphones – are the future. That means the beginning of the process of weaning both themselves and us off the traditional desktop machine. It also means that Windows 8 is a lightweight operating system that's fast and responsive, 'always on' but with low power consumption, and that it works well on a touchscreen.

The big technical change is the move away from Win32 – the

Windows 8 doesn't abandon Win32 but all the fun stuff happens in WinRT

programming model that describes how applications use Windows' resources – which has been the backbone of just about everything Windows does for nearly two decades. Windows 8 doesn't abandon it, it's still there for legacy support, but all the fun stuff happens in the brand new Windows Runtime, or WinRT. Why? WinRT allows apps to run a sandbox, so if one crashes it can't take the whole system with it. It also decouples certain processes and allows more things to happen in the background, so an app shouldn't hang as often while churning through big operations. Also, WinRT is more easily portable to different architectures – like tablets with ARM processors.

Adam says
I like Metro. But in the same week that it launched, we also saw the release of the £22 Linux-based Raspberry Pi. As one European distributor described it to Wired magazine, it's "an attempt to reconnect the iPad generation with what a computer really is". I've ordered my Raspberry Pi. I'm still not sure about Windows 8, though.

The good news is that WinRT isn't just about making mobile applications. You can't use it to write low-level stuff like drivers, but to quote WinSuperSite (*http://bit.ly/pX0o6E*), "there's no reason that the next *Call of Duty* couldn't be a WinRT app". The vision that Windows 8 presents is that the desktop as we know it is dead, and if you're making applications you should start to move away. It may not be Microsoft's overt mission, but it seems a given that if a program can be developed using WinRT rather than Win32, it should.

This is conceptually important because the desktop still exists in the Windows 8 world, and is more or less identical to Windows 7. There are unlikely to be compatibility issues with older programs – I had problems running games in windowed mode rather than fullscreen, but nothing that I don't expect to be fixed by the time it's properly released. The problem from a UI perspective is that

WorldMags.net

you may have heard the desktop – which is the only place you can run Win32 applications and see more than two program windows at a time – described as a separate mode to the new Metro interface, which exclusively supports WinRT apps. That's not true.

To get to the desktop in Windows 8 you need to start the machine and log onto the Metro Start screen using your Windows Live ID. Once logged in, your Start screen should remember any settings from other machines you've been using with the same account, along with your mail settings and calendar and so forth. It's a potential issue because while Microsoft describes this as "cloud enabled", it's almost certainly going to cause privacy headaches in the future.

Back to Metro, though, and it's from this large checked board of bright primary colours and – on a large screen – tiny text (see main picture) that you launch WinRT applications. Some of these tiles can be Android-style widgets that stream weather data, news headlines or show email updates.

The desktop appears as just another launcher, and this is the big conceptual leap. You have to go through Metro to get to the desktop. When you're there, the desktop behaves as any other app – you can pause it into the background or shrink it to two thirds of the screen and run a Metro app like Twitter in a sidebar column.

The problem is that while the desktop and Metro are separately both excellent, they don't work together very well yet. You're never quite sure where you are: opening any system control panel from the Metro launcher opens the desktop anyway, and on two or more monitors only one can show Metro apps. This gives the overall impression – which may admittedly change before release – that Windows 8 is the bastard child of Windows Phone 7 and Windows 7. Do anything beyond simply *consume* an application's content and you could end up anywhere.

Perhaps there's no way around this. Perhaps it's just the growing pains a consumer OS has to go through before it can divorce itself fully from the multi-paned workstation of a professional environment. The forthcoming OS X update, Mountain Lion, has exactly the same issues in my opinion.

Lots could change between now and the final release of Windows 8 – expected to be in October – but I'm not sure it'll be enough to make it perfect. In a few years, the next iteration may have access to hardware that we can't imagine yet, with AR overlays and Kinect-like control that will make moving from desktop to Metro feel natural. In the short term though, and from a PC gamer's point of view, it seems unlikely you're going to have to upgrade your OS just yet. ■

Adam Oxford

The desktop and Metro don't play together well.

WHAT'S IN THE NEW WINDOWS

A quick tour of new features in Windows 8 Customer Preview

CHARMS > Swipe the screen from the right or hover the mouse on the edge of the monitor, and you get the Charms menu. This always has the same five options – Start, Search, Settings, Devices and Share. Search and Settings change depending on what app you're running.

START > Drag the mouse to the bottom left or press the Windows key and you'll call up the big Metro Start screen. You can pin desktop apps there, but it feels more intuitive to start the desktop and use the taskbar launchers instead. You will spend a lot of time clicking Internet Explorer's globe where the Start menu used to be.

FULL SCREEN OR NOT > Grab the top of the screen with a mouse or a finger and you minimise an app (including the desktop) or drag it into a view that takes up one-third or two-thirds of the screen. Essentially, this means you can add a single purpose sidebar to either side of the desktop.

FILE TRANSFER & TASK MANAGER > As well as generally speeding everything up, a few familiar tools have had a makeover. Task Manager is a bit more visual than it used to be, and File Transfer lets you pause or change the priority of actions. There's a ribbon interface for Windows Explorer too.

GAMES > Windows 8 will support DirectX 11.1, which is a very minor upgrade to DX11. Hopefully, there shouldn't be any problems with backwards compatibility. I've had some issues so far, but nothing that couldn't be explained away as beta issues.

METRO > Metro apps are borderless and take up all the available screen space. This is ideal when using a small tablet screen, but can be unfortunate if you just want to check the weather forecast for the Lake District on a 30in monitor.

APP-Y TALKING

CONTROL TURN YOUR PHONE INTO A CONTROLLER

Peripherals designer Roccat (*www.roccat.org*) have launched an iPhone app called Power-Grid, which turns your phone into a touchscreen controller and system display for your PC and games. The app, which is free to download, can show information such as who's talking on Teamspeak and current CPU load. It can also show an array of customisable icons which can be used to launch in-game macros or key commands. Out now on iPhone, there's an Android version to follow and Roccat plans to have a keyboard with built-in phone dock on sale by the end of 2012. **AO**

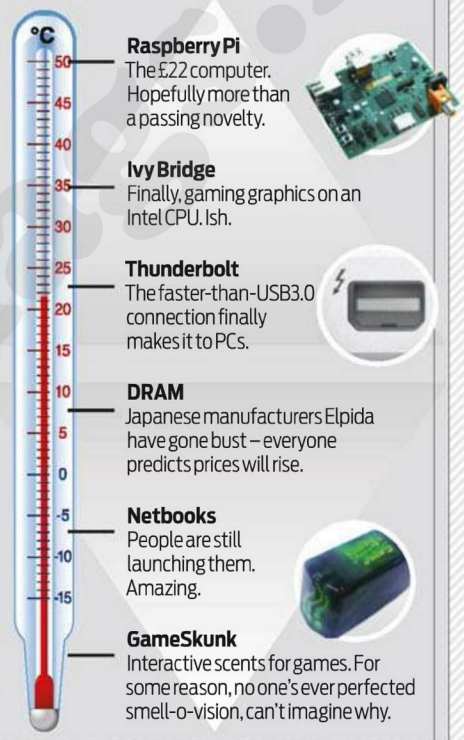
KID GLOVES

GESTURE POLITICS IS HAND CONTROL THE FUTURE?

Now that Microsoft have got Kinect for Windows out of the door, you'd be forgiven for thinking the future of PC control was going to be gesture-based. Possibly not: they've also just been awarded a patent for a handheld gyro-powered pointer that puts the mouse in the palm of your hand. At the same time another manufacturer, Bellco, have unveiled their Ion Air Mouse, a motion sensitive glove that's not unlike the one a certain short actor wore in a certain psy-cop sci-fi. Sigh. **AO**

HOT PRODUCTS

MEASURING HARDWARE FEVER



Raspberry Pi
The £22 computer. Hopefully more than a passing novelty.

Ivy Bridge
Finally, gaming graphics on an Intel CPU. Ish.

Thunderbolt
The faster-than-USB3.0 connection finally makes it to PCs.

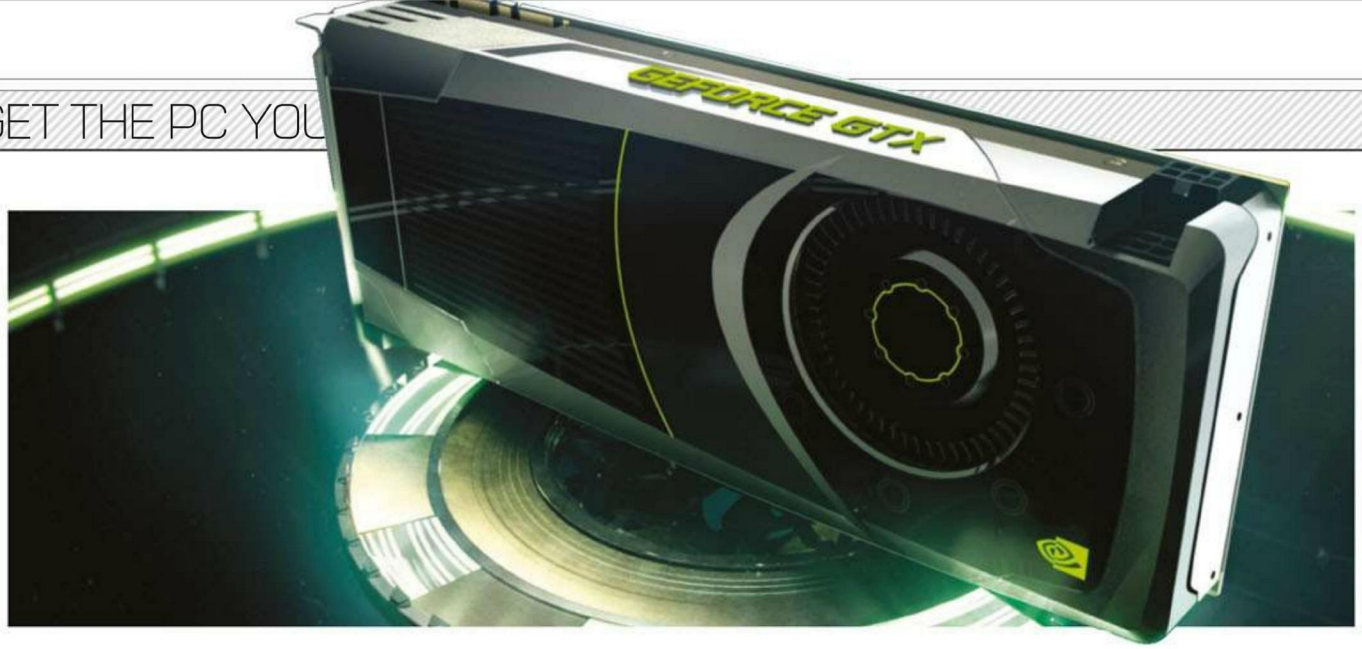
DRAM
Japanese manufacturers Elpida have gone bust – everyone predicts prices will rise.

Netbooks
People are still launching them. Amazing.

GameSkunk
Interactive scents for games. For some reason, no one's ever perfected smell-o-vision, can't imagine why.

©istockphoto.com

WorldMags.net



GeForce GTX680 is go

Nvidia launch new Kepler-based graphics processors with the power to overclock themselves on demand

Thinking of upgrading your graphics card this year? There's no reason to put it off any longer. AMD launched their Radeon HD7000 cards back in December. With Nvidia's announcement of their GeForce 600 range, all the cards are – so to speak – on the table.

For AMD, the new Radeons introduced a massive change to the way they process 3D scenes, called Graphics Core Next. Nvidia's GeForce GTX 600s are also a radical break from the past.

First off, there's a process shrink. Using the new 28nm lithography developed by their manufacturing partner TSMC, Nvidia have squeezed a lot more shader cores and 500 million more transistors onto a silicon die nearly half the size of the previous top-end chip. The GTX 580 had 512 unified shaders arranged in 16 groups of 32 cores that share some resources such as memory. The GTX 680, by comparison, has three times that number – 1536 – arranged in eight groups of 192.

That doesn't mean three times the processing power, however. For a start, the cores no longer run at twice the speed of the rest of the CPU. Where the GTX 580 cores had a clockspeed of over 1.5GHz, the GTX's run at a third of that: 1.005GHz. Also, while the memory runs faster than previous models, the new architecture has a narrower bus, yielding the same overall maximum bandwidth (192GB/s).

Or at least, sometimes it does. The really interesting thing about Kepler is that it takes a cue from the CPU world. Nvidia have introduced a feature called 'GPUBoost' which allows the graphics processor to overclock itself under certain circumstances. Using hardware sensors to monitor temperature and power conditions on the silicon surface, the GeForce 6-series processor will work out when it's using less than its 195W default power cap to increase the clockspeed in 13MHz increments up to a predefined maximum. An Nvidia rep described its low heat generation thus: "If you like to game, it's a delightful thing to have between your legs." Quite.

As a sidenote, that 195W max is very efficient. AMD's well regarded HD7000 series broke most records for performance per watt in a high-end card with a maximum TDP (Thermal Design Power) of 250W.

Just as with CPUs, GPUBoost works better when a certain number of cores are running idle – a likely scenario with so many shaders on the GTX 680. This means that at 100% utilisation across the entire chip, the GTX 680 should step down to its standard 1.005GHz clockspeed and consume 195W. At anything less than 100%, it will start to speed up. Unless you're running a theoretical benchmark designed to max out the GPU, there should be few scenarios when GPUBoost doesn't kick in. By way of example, a typical scene in *Battlefield 3* with most settings ramped up uses about half of the resources available on a GTX 680.

Because tests are no longer strictly repeatable, it makes standard benchmarking a bit nonsensical. A complication we'll have to bear in mind when testing next month.

The exact amount of automatic overclocking allowed by the driver is flexible. By default it's capped at around 1.05GHz, but board partners will be able to supply software for altering the base clockspeed, the power limit and the overclocking increments, along with fairly detailed real-time reporting of the card's current state. Since the reference design from Nvidia only calls for two six-pin molex connectors, it's also expected that there'll be highly overclocked boards with eight-pin plus six-pin adaptors for more power and higher speeds. For a price, of course.

In addition to all of these speed enhancements, there are two new forms of antialiasing. FXAA, already used by AMD cards, produces smooth lines similar to 8xMSAA but with a far lower performance hit, and will be backwards compatible with older cards. Temporal AA is an experimental feature which uses dithering – switching a pixel's colour every frame to blur it – to produce similar results.

Kepler also has an adaptive vsync setting, which allows you to set a maximum framerate for the card and reduce power consumption when not required.

Alongside the top-end GeForce GTX680, there'll be an entire range of desktop chips based on Kepler, and Nvidia are also launching several mobile GPUs that use the technology too. Lower end laptop GPUs, however, will continue to use the older Fermi design. ■

Adam Oxford

GEFORCE GTX COMPARISON

GTX 680	GTX 580
Cores > 1536	**Cores** > 512
Memory > 2GB GDDR5	**Memory** > 1.5GB GDDR5
Core speed > 1.005GHz-1.058GHz	**Core speed** > 772MHz
Memory Speed > 6GHz (effective)	**Memory Speed** > 4GHz (effective)
Texture units > 128	**Texture units** > 64
ROPS > 64	**ROPS** > 48
Memory bus > 256bit	**Memory bandwidth** > 384bit

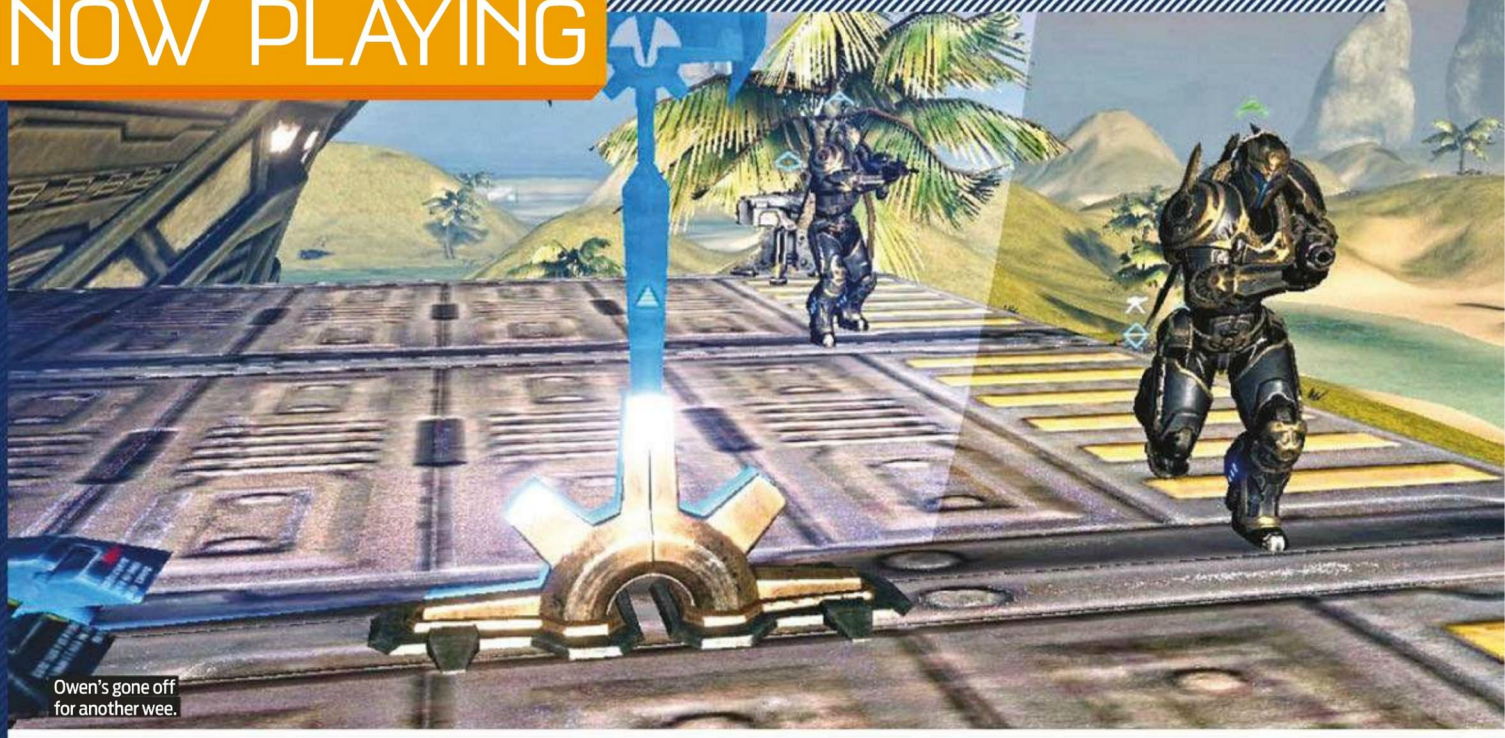
WorldMags.net

ARE *YOU* A NINTENDO GAMER?

GET INDEPENDENT NINTENDO NEWS, REVIEWS & DOGS IN MARIO HATS AT...

NINTENDO-GAMER.NET

NOW PLAYING



Owen's gone off for another wee.

THE PC GAMER TEAM

RICH

OWEN

TIM E

TOM F

GRAHAM S

"You're squeaking, mate. Constantly. Are you all right?"

BEHAVING STRANGELY IN PC GAMER'S FIRST COMPETITIVE **TRIBES: ASCEND** GAME

RICH MCCORMICK

This month Reacted very strangely under his own brain's withering pressure. No change there, then.
Also Played *FIFA 12*, *StarCraft II*

Competitive sportspeople react in strange ways under pressure. Some bottle it, collapsing at the final hurdle and forgetting how to play the game they've devoted their existence to. Some turn to jelly, backing out before the real competition starts. Some excel, drawing on previously untapped mental and physical reserves.

I squeak. I emit loud, long squeaks to relieve my adrenaline buildup. In this case, they were aimed down a headset microphone to the six other people on PC Gamer's Ventrilo server. We were about to play our first *Tribes: Ascend* game of a best-of-three showmatch in Hi-Rez's rebooted jetpack shooter, against a composite team made up of websites MMOHut and OnRPG.

And I was squeaking like a Victorian kettle left on the hob too long.

I play sentinel in *Tribes: Ascend*. He's a sniper class, designed to hit enemies coming in to take our flag, and slap down weakened, flag-holding foes with a shot to the back as they try to escape.

We warmed up on a neutral map. I was reacquainting myself with *Tribes*' mechanics – jetpacking around and 'skiing' down bluffs to gain speed – when Owen piped up over Ventrilo. "Rich, you've gone mental."

What?

"You're squeaking, mate. Constantly squeaking. Are you alright?"

I didn't even realise I was doing it. The match had instilled in me a nervousness that outstripped all of my life's exam mornings put together.

Stopping to consider just how strange I was acting, I brought my scope up and panned around the map. I took a deep breath, and tried to centre myself, tuning into the background noise of the game. What I heard made me realise I wasn't so alone in my insanity.

Graham was over at the other base, running through his stealthy infiltrator gameplan. The match hadn't started yet, but he was engaging his cloak and firing stealth spinfusor shots at our opponents, letting out bursts of high pitched laughter with each meaningless kill. Owen's bladder failed him: having returned from a bathroom break some 30 seconds earlier, he deployed two turrets next to our flag before yelping "I NEED A WEE!" and running off to relieve himself again. As the first competitive map loaded, he went a third time.

For a short time, our Ventrilo server was hushed. Tuning into the near-silence, I could hear an odd noise repeating. I Alt-Tabbed quickly, checking whose little microphone symbol was flashing.

Chris was playing as pathfinder. Pathfinders are *Tribes: Ascend*'s nippiest class, built to get in and out of a base, flag in hand, and return it for a

READ ME

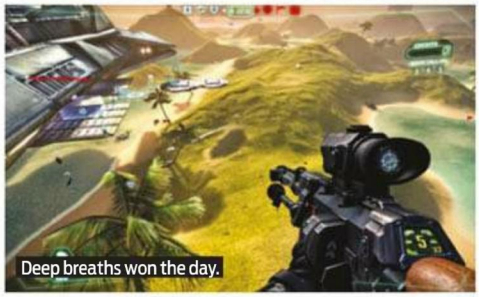
RELEASED Open beta
OUR REVIEW N/A
BUY IT Free
MORE tribesascend.com

WorldMags.net

Set squeak volume to maximum.

My view for most of the game.

Flag, flag, flag, flag, flag.


Deep breaths won the day.

capture. His weapons are, compared to the beefier classes, underpowered: if you're getting into lots of fights as a pathfinder, you're probably playing the class wrong.

It was Chris's microphone flashing. I right-clicked Ventrilo's user settings, artificially boosting his volume. It turned his mumbles into clear speech: "flag, flag, flag, flag, flag." Deep breath. "Flag, flag, flag, flag. Flag flag."

I realised my affliction was comparatively tame in comparison to some of my teammates: Owen's bladder withering under the pressure, Chris's mind smashed and reeling. How could these men – a well-drilled unit of men that I'd spent a week training, planning, and killing with – fall apart so perfectly in the face of our first battlefield experience?

Someone needed to take charge. Someone needed to discipline these troops before we lost our heads and our game to our own physical and mental collapse. That someone wasn't going to be me. I was too busy squeaking.

We won all three games 5-0. I squeaked my way through the entire match.

The minimap shows the full majesty of the experience.

"A mass of nonsense cruising through the world"

JOIN AN XP MEGATRAIN IN **REALM OF THE MAD GOD**

OWEN HILL

This month Took a journey on a train packed with XP whores. Died. Did it again.
Also Played *Tribes: Ascend, Counter Strike: Source, Diablo 3 beta*

Realm of the Mad God is a 2D MMO-lite with big pixels and the pace of a bullet-hell shooter. Kill stuff and you'll get a bundle of XP. Alternatively, you can stand next to someone else as they do the killing. That gets you XP too.

A low-level player will usually scan the map, killing minions and mini-bosses. They avoid projectiles, manage their mana/heath bonuses, and travel in groups of two or three. That's what I was doing when I noticed some anomalies in *RotMG*'s chat.

"ANYONE 4 TRAIN?"

"I think there's one starting in Demon"

"TRAAAAAAAAAAIN!"

"BUY GOLD BOW?"

"TRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAIN"!

They call it a 'train.' A bundle of players storm through the game world, farming XP and following *RotMG*'s roads, which provide a speed buff and a path to follow. And, this being a free-to-play game, there are plenty of XP-starved adventurers who love to unlock things, even if it involves one of the most ludicrous escapades I've witnessed.

80+ characters get bundled into a ball of death-and-exploit. XP bars get filled in seconds. Green numbers flash up relentlessly. We are a ball of power. A mass of nonsense cruising through the world, built from exploit and free-to-play camaraderie.

"TRAAAAAAAAIN" I type, losing my place in the accelerating mass. Not that it matters, I've gained ten levels in five minutes, and I feel liberated. Another nine levels and I'll unlock the knight class – arguably the classiest-class of all.

I return to the Nexus to gather a small group players with complimentary skills. Then, I have a better idea.

"ANYONE 4 TRAIN?"

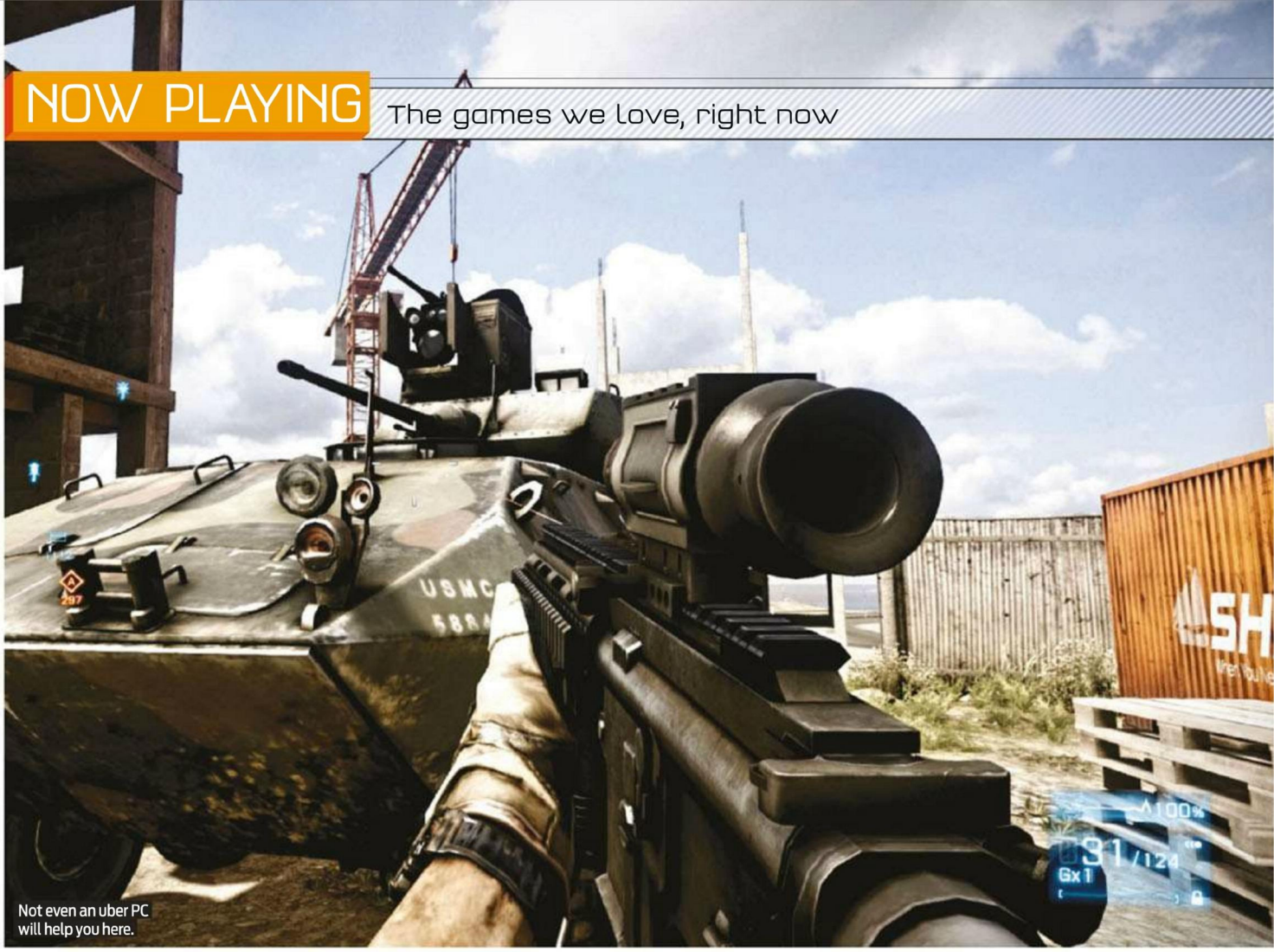
READ ME

RELEASED January 2011
OUR REVIEW N/A
BUY IT Free
MORE bit.ly/MadGod

The Nexus is *a bit* like Paddington Station.

Hardly anyone plays it sensibly.

WorldMags.net



Not even an uber PC will help you here.

"So much going on, you can't take your eyes off the screen"

UPGRADING YOUR PC TURNS **BATTLEFIELD 3** INTO SOMETHING VERY SPECIAL

TIM EDWARDS

This month Built a new PC using old paperclips and (this is entirely true) a lump of blu-tack.
Also Played *Alan Wake, StarCraft II*

We always tell you that you probably don't need to worry about upgrading your PC. Our default position on hardware says you could spend loads of money on silicon, but we think you'll have more fun in the long run saving it for new games.

I proffer an alternate view: spend loads of money on your PC, and just play *Battlefield 3* for the rest of your life.

My old PC was terrible. My new PC is a thing of beauty. It crushes everything I install on it. Including DICE's PC-breaker itself, *Battlefield 3*.

Good grief, *Battlefield 3* is unbelievable at 60 frames a second. Not just pretty but fluid and responsive. Hypnotic is the word: there is just so much detail, so much going on you can't take your eyes off the screen. It's tactile, too: the recoil on the sniper rifle becomes a predictable, pleasant feel when you see every frame of its motion. Under machinegun fire you get a real sense of suppression as dust, dirt and masonry are scattered in front of you.

And suddenly, you become good at *Battlefield 3*. Or at least, I do.

A bad workman blames his tools. A bad gamer blames his framerate. In this case, however, it's true: a lower framerate makes you a worse player of *Battlefield 3*. I now find myself gently tracking players' heads as they move, taking more careful aim. I find that I can hit better, harder, and for longer sustained bursts.

I'm still not brilliant: I'll leave that to our *Battlefield 3* obsessed Art Ed, John. But whereas before I felt like I would never get any better at the game, now I feel that I'm improving. Like Kenny Rogers and countless gamblers before me, when it comes to capture points, I know when to hold 'em, and I know when to, umm, fold 'em.

Thanks to John, I've also been introduced to a new, special thrill. Hardcore mode. Hardcore mode should actually be called: 'default mode'.

It removes the training wheels: your screen is no longer covered in red dots where enemies have been spotted, you have a fraction less health, and you won't automatically heal yourself. There's no crosshair so you have to rely on iron or optical sights, and there's no kill-cam. Oh, and friendly fire is on.

It sounds horrible. But it's just about the most exciting way to play that I've found. It rewards tight-teamwork, cautious advancement and great pilots and drivers. All of which I aspire to.

So: for once in PC Gamer's life you have my permission to upgrade your PC to beyond monstrous. Do it.

Do it now.

READ ME

RELEASED September 2011
OUR REVIEW PCG 236, 84%
BUY IT £40
MORE www.battlefield.com

WorldMags.net

"It's a test. It tests whether you like puzzles"

TOM LOOKS FOR A GREAT PUZZLE GAME IN **QUBE**. FINDS ONE, STILL COMPLAINS.

TOM FRANCIS

This month Pushed blocks around, rotated rooms, mulled intensely.
Also Played *Mass Effect 3, Tribes: Ascend, Spelunky, Dota 2*

Tsk, think of all the grouting.

Qube is a pure puzzle game: you're in some weird white chambers, you have a glove thingy that can pull out or push in coloured blocks, you solve puzzles. Unlike *Portal*, there's no perceptible story, context or even pacing. Solved a puzzle? Solve the next puzzle!

The bit I'm at, I have to trigger a ball to roll down a slope, then rotate a section of the level to catch it before it rolls away, nudge it into a zone that will paint it blue, then shunt it back towards a blue forcefield it can now roll through. Why? I don't know, it'll probably open a door or something.

Stripping away everything except the puzzles makes *QUBE* an interesting test: it tests whether you like puzzles. It's something I'd never really thought about. I notice when a puzzle is too hard, too easy, or illogical, but what about when they're perfect? Is that bliss, or just unintrusive? I find *QUBE* satisfying, but that's it.

I love *Portal*, and *Portal*'s puzzles are expertly judged, but I'm starting to realise that's not *why* I love it. I love the puzzles because they involve bending and reconfiguring my spatial awareness, which is an amazing experience. When the puzzles are just moving blocks and rolling balls, even if they're as perfectly designed as Valve's, the excitement is gone.

I still like *QUBE*, and for anyone who loves puzzles for the pure mental challenge, it's probably perfect. I thought that was me, but instead it's helped me understand the pleasure of puzzle games in a new way.

READ ME

RELEASED June 2008
OUR REVIEW PCG 189, 89%
BUY IT £9.99
MORE masseffect.com

History: Scotland defeated England by using giants.

Thatcher broke up the region of Menu in 1996.

"Enough Shakespearean Hollyoaks to fill a week"

PLEASING THE POPE IN **CRUSADER KINGS II**

GRAHAM SMITH

This month Got married, drove his brother away, had a daughter, led a war. Was busy.
Also Played *Tribes: Ascend*

For all its complexity, *Crusader Kings II* is surprisingly simple. It's what would happen if *The Sims* met *Football Manager*, had a baby and asked *Total War* to be the godfather: a warren of button-covered menus where every click steers the leaders of medieval Europe towards war and juicy melodrama.

Even though I have no idea what I'm doing, the game is an efficient machine for telling stories. In two hours as King Malcolm I of Scotland, I experience enough Shakespearean Hollyoaks to fill a week on Channel 4.

To begin with, I replace my deceased wife by marrying a princess of the Holy Roman Empire. She has no interest in me, but wants to marry royalty and improves my standing with the Pope. Bargain.

Not content, I fulfil one of Malcolm's ambitions by having a daughter. The kid hates me due to her Kind character trait clashing with my Cruelty, but like all good parents I buy her love, by mailing her gifts from the frontlines of a war I'm fighting north of Italy.

I even uncover a plot by my brother to kill my heir and eldest son. I move to have him arrested, but the coward escapes and flees to England.

I've started to understand the basics of the game now, from keeping my vassals happy to making sure my lineage is secured by protecting and educating my children. There's a continent of information still to learn, but it's a rare and brilliant grand strategy game that can craft such salacious anecdotes just by the player prodding blindly at buttons.

READ ME

RELEASED February 14
OUR REVIEW PCG 238, 87%
BUY IT Steam £30
MORE bit.ly/pcgking2

WorldMags.net

Don Quixote is back, and this time it's personal.

1 BLITZKRIEG

MOD FULLY REINFORCE YOUR *COMPANY OF HEROES*

The amount of new material that *Blitzkrieg* brings to *Company of Heroes* is impressive. It's a realism-themed total conversion for the WWII-themed RTS that adds dozens of new units, new skins for all the existing units, new hi-def textures, sounds, 32 new maps, redesigned command trees and a much more realistic weapon damage system.

The end result: each game is now a much deadlier affair. Infantry in the open are mowed down by machinegun fire, tanks are ambushed as they drive into villages and artillery tears apart anything caught in its blast radius.

Tank battles are now won or lost on gun-size, range and armour, instead of damage numbers and health bars. This forces you to choose between building the quicker, cheaper tank with the inferior gun or hoping you can hold out until you can build the better tank.

Balance has changed as well. Axis tanks are generally better armed and armoured than their Allied counterparts, but they're also slower, cost more and take longer to produce. This leads to some interesting tactical choices for both sides.

Infantry weapons have had their accuracy, damage and suppression values altered to make them closer to their-real world counterparts. There are risks associated with building specialist units: If your sniper is caught on his own he's probably going to die.

Blitzkrieg places a much greater emphasis on resource management. Everything from firing artillery guns to upgrading your infantry now costs resources, and your resource pools are capped at a certain level, forcing you to carefully consider your priorities. Do you shell that advancing enemy, or upgrade your own infantry's weapons?

CHRIS SAYS...
"The correct answer is always 'more tanks'."

Blitzkrieg requires only one of the three *Company of Heroes* titles installed. It works online, comes with its own installer, and even works with Steam versions of the game. The mod is still active, so keep your eyes peeled for more additions in the near future. **CT**

bit.ly/pcg239-1

2 SKYRIM MINI-MODS

MOD TWEAKS AND CHANGES TO PERFECT YOUR ELDER SCROLLS ADVENTURE

The Steam Workshop makes it easier than ever to fine-tune the already wonderful world of *Skyrim*. Here are a few subtle mods that we're fond of. **EM**

WALK
This appropriately-titled mod slightly increases your walking speed to match that of *Skyrim*'s natives. No more sprinting to keep up. *bit.ly/pcg239-2a*

LIGHTER DRAGON BONES
Collecting to make dragon armour? Change the weight of bones and scales to a more reasonable 5kg. *bit.ly/pcg239-2b*

NPCS USE AMMO
Narked by NPCs firing infinite arrows from a high vantage point? With this mod, they use up arrows like everyone else. *bit.ly/pcg239-2c*

OPEN GUARD HELMETS
Face coverings are weird and antisocial. Make *Skyrim*'s faceless upholders of the law more human with this. *bit.ly/pcg239-2d*

WorldMags.net

3 THAT

MOD EXPLORE A WORLD OF LIGHT AND SOUND

Impossible-to-Google *Half-Life 2* mod *THAT* is a self-professed art project, a collection of nine environments designed for first-person exploration. Ostensibly you're gathering an item from each area to build a sculpture, but the reality is about appreciating creator Axel Shokk's eye for colour and design.

Each area is based on a real environment – jungles, deserts, glaciers – but heavily abstracted into towering multi-coloured monoliths and abrupt shifts in tone. While an original soundtrack is in the works, the mod currently uses samples from Philip Glass's atmospheric accompaniment to Godfrey Reggio's cult 1982 movie Koyaanisqatsi. **CT**

bit.ly/pcg239-3

What *Far Cry 3* will look like on Xbox.

Seems a nice spot for a picnic.

4 HACKNET ALPHA

FREEWARE ASSUME CONTROL OF *HACKNET*'S SYSTEMS

Indie hacking sim *Hacknet* is a marginally more realistic counterpart to Introversion's excellent *Uplink*. You accept contracts and hack fictional systems through an interface that's designed to look and feel as realistic as possible. *Hacknet* is still in alpha, so expect a few bugs and crashes, but it's showing a lot of promise. **CT**

bit.ly/pcg239-4

A **VIEW PORTS** Probing a system reveals the ports you need to control to gain access. In this case, a proxy server has also been detected.

B **SITE MAP** A visual representation of the different servers you know about. You can also connect directly when you know their IP addresses.

C **CONSOLE CONTROLLER** This DOS-style interface is where you enter your commands. Type 'help' for a full list.

5 VERMINEST

FREEWARE A LONG TIME AGO, IN A *GALAGA* FAR, FAR AWAY

Revitalising arcade classics is a staple of indie games, but Locomalito's *They Came From Verminest* stands out for its pitch-perfect recreation of not only the mood of classic blasters such as *Galaga* and *Centipede*, but the B-grade science fiction that inspired them in the first place.

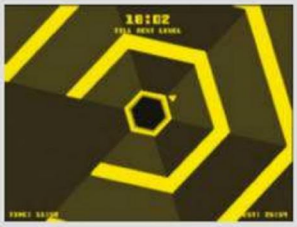
You control a starship on a vertically-scrolling 2D field, blasting space bugs as they scroll down the screen. Later levels include indoor battles that add extra environmental dangers and pattern-based boss fights. Short-range kills and knocking out enemy leaders earns medals, which in turn unlock bonuses. Destroying bonus space eggs between missions also yields upgrades to your weapons.

Further enhancing the vintage feel are options to play using a movie-style grain filter, or even in special-glasses 3D mode. The game is so retro it looks oddly good in this mode even without the glasses. **CT**

bit.ly/pcg239-5

WorldMags.net

6



HEXAGON

WEBGAME TRIANGLE-SHAPED PEG, MEET IMPOSSIBLE HOLE

Hexagon was made by *VVVVVV* creator Terry Cavanagh for GDC's indie 'Pirate Kart' event. It's a twitch-based insta-death gauntlet where you rotate a triangle around a hexagon while obstacles crash in from off-screen.

The aim is simply to survive as long as possible, with new thresholds ticked off at ten-second intervals. Games really are that short: as is Cavanagh's wont, *Hexagon* takes a single, simple game idea and makes it both incredibly compulsive and punishingly difficult.

Levels pulse, spin and change colour as chip-musician Chipzel's chiptune soundtrack buzzes away in the background. Chippily.

Hexagon is perfectly happy to throw you into impossible situations, but sessions are short enough that it's hard not to resist taking a second stab at it. It's *Canabalt* boiled down, concentrated, poured into a neon shotglass, and then chucked back into your eye. Playing badly can be frustrating – like bashing your head against a wall of flashing lights – but get into the zone and the sense of mastery is very satisfying. **CT**

bit.ly/pcg239-6

7

CO-OP

FREEWARE KILL ALIENS WITH THE POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

Co-op, if you hadn't guessed, is a game about teamwork. A specific, difficult, and friendship-wrecking form of teamwork: deciding where to go.

You control a pair of spaceships linked by a flexible laser 'rope' of limited length. Capturing enemies in the rope kills them, and earns you points in the manner of a twin-stick shooter. Being hit causes you to blow up and tethers your partner to a flaming wreck while you regenerate. Agreeing on a direction and sticking to it is absolutely crucial.

Both players share a keyboard, with one on WASD and another on the arrow keys – so there's no real excuse for miscommunication. But attempting to establish an effective route quickly descends into the kind of "I thought you were leading" arguments that traditionally result when trying to find a pub without a plan on a night out.

A lot of effort has been put into the art style: ships and aliens are hand-drawn scraps of paper and card on a backdrop of cutout planets and stars. It's a simple game at heart, but the high quality of its presentation puts it ahead a few notches. Worth firing up for as long as your relationships can take it. **CT**

bit.ly/pcg239-7

8

CANVAS RIDER

WEBGAME DRAW YOUR OWN STUNT COURSE

Canvas Rider is a browser-based motocross game that combines the physics-based biking of RedLynx's *Trials HD* with *TrackMania*'s powerful level design tools. Every stage is hand-drawn in a sketched monochrome style that gives it the look of a careless doodle in the back of a school textbook.

The only fixed element of a given level is your baseball-capped stick-man cyclist, whose many crippling tumbles are rendered with wince-inducing ragdoll animations. You control it very much like *Trials*: the bike carries a lot of momentum, and hitting slopes at the right angle is necessary to avoid flying over the handlebars. The ability to flip the bike around 180 degrees adds an extra level of challenge on certain courses.

It's a simple formula that lends itself well to *Canvas Rider*'s vast amount of user-generated content. While stages vary in quality, the ability to click 'Random Track' and immediately be playing something new is a great motivator to keep exploring.

There are some impressive tracks to find, too: given only the most basic tools, some players are capable of sketching out works of art. It's a fun way to explore a community's creative side, and to break your neck doing it. **CT**

bit.ly/pcg239-8

WorldMags.net

9 LEFT 4 DEAD 2 MAPS

MOD ONCE MORE INTO THE VALLEY OF DEATH. WITH YOUR MATES.

Playing *Left 4 Dead 2*'s official maps can feel stale by your 100th playthrough. That's where the community comes in. Mappers have been busy constructing new mods and campaigns to refresh your zombie hunt. We've chosen three of the best to help you experience something new. **EM**

SUICIDE BLITZ 2

Scripted sequences and a fully voiced story make this good enough to be compared to Valve's own handiwork. Great set pieces and a superb ending as you exit the stadium. *bit.ly/pcg239-9a*

SILENT HILL L4D2

Brings the classic survival horror setting to *Left 4 Dead*. And then fills it with zombies. Again. See how many references to *Silent Hill* you can spot, and bring a sick bag. *bit.ly/pcg239-9b*

HELM'S DEEP REBORN

It's Tolkien's most famous last stand, plus guns, minus elves. A winning recipe. The timing of events keeps the adrenaline flowing and ensures you're always on the back foot. *bit.ly/pcg239-9c*

10

FILOSOFIGHTERS

WEBGAME IT'S THE ARENA OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES

This is a Portuguese-made 2D fighting game that pitches philosophers from Plato to Sartre against each other, in a tournament that's more about punching faces than stroking chins.

The ostensible intent is to educate you about each thinkers' outlook and legacy, but really it's about enjoying their spectacular – and often spectacularly inappropriate – special moves. Cheer as Marx unleashes a mob of angry proletarians! See Nietzsche drop God's corpse on St Augustine! **CT**

bit.ly/pcg239-10

Crash Time 4 – The Syndicate © dtp entertainment AG. All rights reserved. Developed by SYNETIK GmbH & Co. KG. All company names, brand names, trademarks and logos are the property of their respective owners. "PS5 Logo", "PlayStation", "PS3" and "PSN Logo" are trademarks or registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Windows, the Windows Vista Start button and Xbox 360 are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies, and "Games for Windows" and the Windows Vista Start button logo are used under license from Microsoft. XINECT, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft. Crash Time 3D © dtp entertainment AG. All rights reserved. Developed by Independent Arts Software GmbH. All company names, brand names, trademarks and logos are the property of their respective owners. Nintendo 3DS is a trademarks of Nintendo. For more information about the 3D feature of Nintendo 3DS, please visit the official website at nintendo3ds.co.uk.

WorldMags.net

VIVE LE TANKS

DON A BERET AND COME OVER ALL FRENCH IN **WORLD OF TANKS**. *By Tom Senior*

READ ME

FIRST REVIEWED
PCG 227, 85%

PUBLISHER
Wargaming.net

DEVELOPER
Wargaming.net

REQUIRES
2.2GHz CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 6800GT/ATI X800, 3.5GB HDD

LINK
worldoftanks.com

COMMUNITY
forum.worldoftanks.com

World of Tanks players weren't exactly quaking in their boots at the prospect of a brand new line of French tanks, but their arrival with patch 7.1 was a pleasant surprise. Shiny new autoloader technology was the most coveted addition, integrated into a meaty selection of new heavy tanks. They're perched at the very top of a brand new tech tree that also adds a fresh series of light tanks, and a small selection of mediums. But they give a terrible first impression.

At lower tiers, French tanks show a considerable reluctance to reach the enemy. The first thing I noticed after jumping into battle with the entry-level French light tank, the Renault D1, was its awful, awful speed. On every map I was left choking on my teammates' dust as they bounded away from the deployment zone. French light tanks like the Renault, the Hotchkiss H 35, the D1, and even its entry-level medium tank have some of the thickest armour and slowest speeds of any nation. You're likely to find yourself bringing up the rear more often than not, and don't be surprised if you reach the enemy control point to find the fighting already over.

The heavy armour of the entry-level French vehicles should make them good vehicles for beginners, but their ponderous pace makes them too frustrating to use even as tutorial tanks. The Renault FT might as well spawn facing backwards for all the good it'll have on the outcome of a fight. However, once you've ground through the lower tiers, the French tanks reverse roles completely. They become faster, flimsier and deadlier with each round. Their most impressive heavy tanks are relatively nippy and come equipped with the new automated reloading system.

Unique to the French, the autoloader turns heavy tanks like the AMX 50 into a massive revolver. Six rounds can be fired off in quick succession. A top-tier French tank can unleash a barrage of shells with only a second or two of separation, flinging enough condensed firepower to obliterate some of the toughest tanks in the game outright.

There are a few drawbacks to the new system. Firstly, the machinery takes shells from your tank's ammo reserves, eliminating the need for a crew member. Sounds like a bonus, but good crew members grant your tank useful performance bonuses that you don't get this way. The other difficulty is the French heavies' wafer-thin armour. French heavies can be quickly immobilised and reduced to scrap by a few well-aimed enemy shots, making them the high-risk, high-reward glass cannons of a team. In the hands of a high-level player with an eye for an ambush, they're deadly. In inexperienced hands they can feel completely useless.

> "The Renault FT may as well spawn backwards for all the good it'll do"

Tanks for nothing

The autoloader is a good prize for seasoned *WoT* players, and the balance of the top-tier French tanks offers risky options for those with the chutzpah to dive into the poorly sheltered driving seat of an AMX 50. The Russians do enormous cannons, the Germans do accurate cannons, the Americans do manoeuvrable cannons and the French do mad, robot cannons. Their light tanks are useless even as cappers – they only have three medium selections and, as of now, no tank destroyers at all. But they're different enough at the top to carve out their own niche into *World of Tank*'s growing selection of vehicles.

The new French tanks give *World of Tanks* players what they really want: more tanks. That's not to say there aren't loads already, but there can always be more, and the desire for new breeds of war machine has only grown over the past year as Wargaming.net have catered to the community's requests for more maps. There are now 24 arenas offering a good mix of wide outdoor areas, ruined city streets, woodland, marshland and even Arctic regions.

Recent patches have also added tank paint. This lets you pay a little bit of gold (about 30p) to give your tank a garish makeover. Gold can still be used to train crew members which can be useful at high levels, and you can buy well-balanced premium tanks that can earn you experience faster, which in turn can be used to unlock more tanks as you progress through your tech tree. A light premium tank will set you back about £3. The most expensive option is a German heavy tank, which costs close to £30.

Buying premium time is by far the best option if you're prepared to spend money in *World of Tanks*. This doubles the amount of experience you gain from each battle, lessening the grind needed to unlock new tank parts and vehicles enormously. You can buy a day of time for a couple of quid to get a taste of the benefits. If you decide to dive in, a premium subscription costs £8.45 a month, which equates to a standard MMO subscription charge. You can technically reach the very best tanks by playing on a free account, but it will take a huge amount of grinding to gain enough experience.

If you've been meaning to try *World of Tanks*, it's still well worth giving it a shot – the huge number of players online at any given time makes for almost instantaneous matchmaking. *WoT* is brutal, especially for new players forced to fight with base vehicles like the inept Leichttraktor (aka The Loltraktor). New tanks are unlocked quickly in the beginning though, and it's worth collecting a couple before deciding if *World of Tanks*' curiously tense team battles are your cup of tea. You'll definitely want to stay clear of those French tanks though, unless you enjoy being left behind while the rest of your team drives off to fight the war.

FRENCH STRESSING Weak spots on the French ARL 44

Devastate the derriere
They forgot to put armour on its arse. A fatal mistake.

Terrorise the turret
Sloped frontal armour deflects shells well. Hit the turret instead.

Attack the track
There's an easy way to stop this tank in its tracks – put a shell in its tracks.

Massive damage
Deliver the coup de grace to a French tank's face

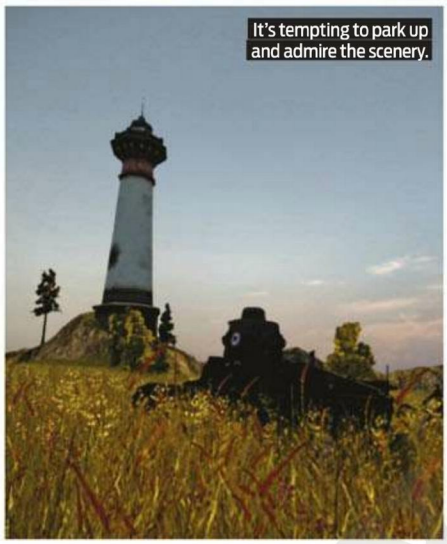
WorldMags.net

Why do these flags need capturing? It's a mystery.

Roll with back-up if you want to live.

WoT's maps feel enormous.

You'll be trailing the pack in the new French tanks.


It's tempting to park up and admire the scenery.

Trying to hide, little tank? Your glowing red outline betrays you.

WorldMags.net

Make a giant evil crazy hag in SKYRIM

CREATE AN EASY FIRST MOD AND GET IT ON THE STEAM WORKSHOP. **By Tom Francis**

GET STARTED

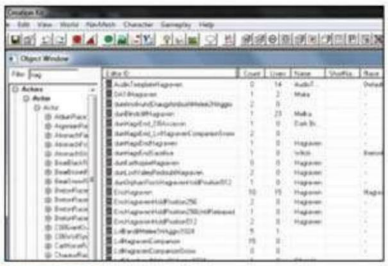
DIFFICULTY Moderate
TIME One hour

VITAL LINKS
Creation Kit wiki
www.creationkit.com
Video tutorials
bit.ly/SkyVidTut
More on quest objectives
bit.ly/PCGSkyQuest

You only need one thing to make a mod for *Skyrim*: The Creation Kit. It's the same world, story and scripting editor that Bethesda used to make the game itself, and you can do some amazing things with it. Some of those things are hard. We're going to do something that isn't.

The Creation Kit is free, and if you've got *Skyrim* then you've already got it hidden away in your Steam library. Go to your games library, and from the dropdown menu click on Tools. Scroll down to C, for Creation Kit, and install it.

Once it's downloaded, start it up and go to File > Data... and double-click Skyrim.esm. That tells the editor to load all of *Skyrim*'s data, so we can start modifying it. Once we have, we'll make a new data file for our mod, and the editor will be smart enough to store our changes in that new file. In other words, your original *Skyrim* game data won't be permanently changed.



1 Hag it and tag it

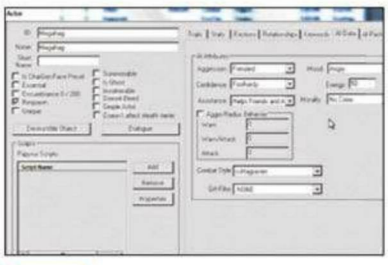
I know: let's create a giant crazy evil hag and tell it to kill everyone. In the Object Window (top left), click on Actors, then under that, Actor. The Creation engine calls all people and creatures in the game Actors, like it's all some big performance. Where it says 'Filter' in the top left, type in 'hag' – we're looking for the Hagraven, and this will find us all Actors with 'hag' in their name.

2 A new woman

Double-click on EncHagRaven. Enc is short for encounter – Hagravens are horrible old women you sometimes encounter. We're going to edit this one to make it even more horrible. The first thing to do is to change her ID – that tells the editor we're creating a new type of thing, not editing all the Hagravens already in the world. Call her Megahag, and put that in the Name field so we'll see it in-game.

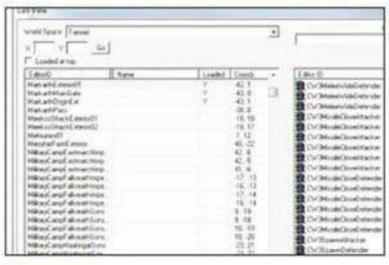
3 Embiggen

Now let's mess with stuff! Uncheck Respawn, and check Unique – our lady is one-of-a-kind. Change her Height to 10 – that's ten times normal size. Click the Stats tab, uncheck Auto Calc Stats so we can tweak these manually. Give her 1,000 extra health, 200 extra magicka, and click on her Destruction skill in the table, then add 100 to that. We want her to be crazy, evil *and* powerful.



4 Make her crazy

Any time you want to screw with someone's head, you click on their AI Data tab. Aggression? Frenzied! Mood? Angry! Confidence? Foolhardy! Assistance? Helps nobody! To be honest, Hagravens are already most of the way to nuts with the starting values they have, but it's fun to ramp them all up. We're done for now, so click OK and say yes to the box that pops up next.



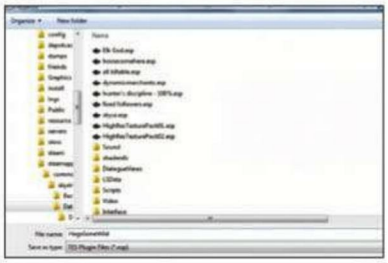
5 Show her the world

We've created a Megahag. Now we want to place her in the game itself. *Skyrim*'s world is divided into areas called Cells, so check out the Cell View in the bottom left. In the dropdown list, find Tamriel: that's the whole outside world. I like Markarth, so let's put our hag there. Scroll down to MarkarthExterior01, and double-click it. After a while, it'll pop up in the game view window.

6 OK what the hell

Looks weird, I know. Click somewhere in the 3D view, and press M to turn off Markers – those are the lurid coloured shapes making everything look nuts. Hold Shift and move the mouse to look around. If you can't make sense of it, look down and use the mouse wheel to zoom out – that'll put you higher up, for a better overview. Holding the middle button lets you pan with the mouse.

WorldMags.net

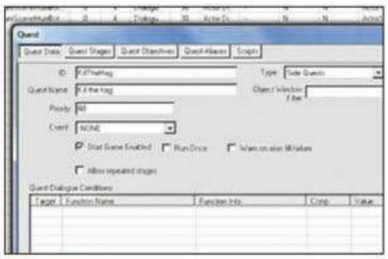


7 Floor her

Once you've got your bearings, find a secluded spot and drag the Megahag from the list on the left to the 3D window. She'll appear where you release the mouse. Press F to align her feet with the floor. Make sure you can identify the spot where you've placed her, because you'll have to find her in-game. OK, you've made a mod. Let's save it now and try it out – call the mod HagsGoneWild or whatever.

8 Make it so

If you want to check that it's all worked so far, close the Creation Kit, then fire up *Skyrim*'s launcher and click Data Files. You should find *Skyrim* has been clever and already checked the box next to HagsGoneWild – if not, check it. Then start the game. Fast-travel to Markarth and you should find Megahag wreaking havoc outside the city gates, or unnoticed somewhere nearby.



9 Be objective, hag

To get a handle on how to create quests in *Skyrim*, let's give the player a reason to tangle with the Hag. In the Objects view, click on Characters and then Quests. There'll be a big list of quests on the right – right-click anywhere in that and choose 'New'. Let's give our quest the unique ID of KillTheHag and the name 'Kill the hag', to keep it simple. Set the priority to 60 because reasons.

10 This is narrative

Click on the Quest stages tab and we'll tell *Skyrim* how our quest goes. To add a stage, right click under Index and go to New. Call this one 0, then add another and call it 10. Under Log Entry, right-click and click New. Type something like "I suddenly feel like killing this crazy hag." Add a new index, call it 20, and make the log entry something like "Well, now I feel bad." Check 'Complete Quest'.

11 Link her up

Back to the hag! Open her up in the Object editor, and under Scripts, click Add. Call it MegahagScript and say OK. It'll show up in the Script list now – select it and click Properties. Change the type from Int to Quest, and the name to MegahagQuest. Once the script is added, we can conveniently click it and pick the quest we want from a list – type 'kill' to jump to KillTheHag, and choose that.

```
Scriptname MegahagScript extends ObjectReference

Event OnLoad()
    MegahagQuest.SetObjectiveDisplayed(10)
    MegahagQuest.SetStage(10)
EndEvent

Event OnDeath(Actor killer)

    MegahagQuest.SetObjectiveDisplayed(20)
    MegahagQuest.SetStage(20)
EndEvent

Quest Property MegahagQuest  Auto
```

12 Script it

Right-click the MegahagScript and select Edit source. Let's write a script! Type what you see in the screenshot above and you'll have learnt some useful scripting basics. Scripting is event-driven: we're basically saying when the hag is loaded – ie, we're nearby – start the quest. And when the hag is dead, complete the quest. You're done! Save, close the Creation Kit, and try it out in game again.

SKILLS

WORKSHOP IT

HOW TO GET YOUR MOD ON THE STEAM WORKSHOP

1 Bethesda have made it super easy for us to put our mods online for other players to try. In fact you can do it without even leaving the Creation Kit. Just go to File, Upload plugin and Archive to Steam. Ignore the next screen, just click Pack files. It's like packing your suitcases, but different.

2 If that was our luggage, then this is your passport check. You've got to fill in some details to explain your mod to other people. It's all pretty straightforward. Take a screenshot of your mod in action, then crop it to be square before selecting it as the thumbnail image here.

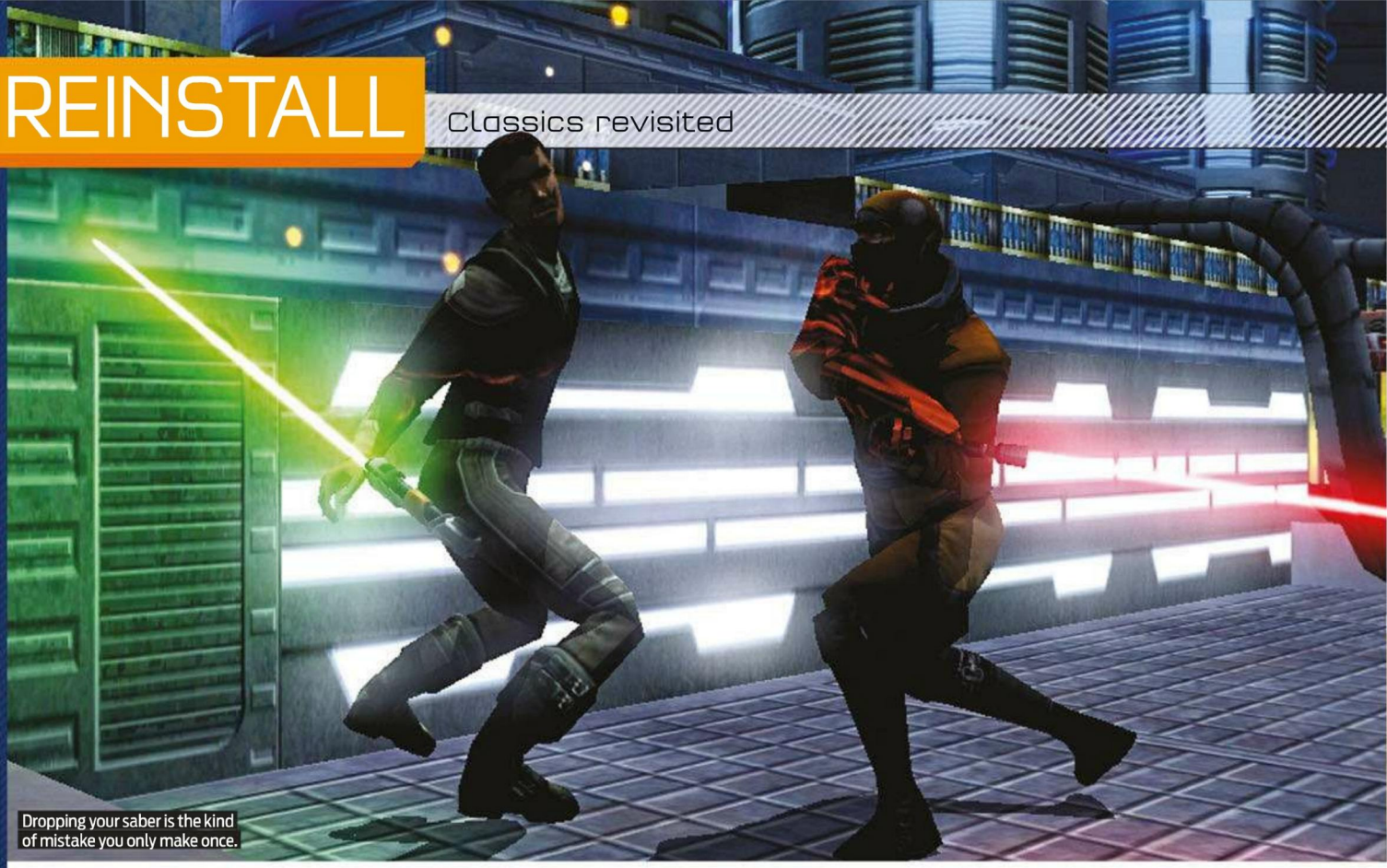
3 When you're done, click Upload and your mod will be away on its travels almost instantly. There's no tiresome approval process, it just goes straight up. A bit like travelling Business Class. Go to the Workshop and find the link for My Steam Workshop files – click that and you'll find your mod there.

BONUS TIP

UPDATE IT

To upload a newer version of your mod later, it's the same process. Say 'yes' to using the same .bsa file. When the new version goes up, people who've subscribed to your mod will automatically get the new one next time they play. This is awesome.

WorldMags.net



Dropping your saber is the kind of mistake you only make once.

"Killing everyone in the room in the most elaborate way possible"

MAKE YOUR OWN SOUND EFFECTS REVISITING **JEDI ACADEMY**. *By Chris Thursten*

READ ME

FIRST REVIEWED
PCG 127, 70%

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Raven Software

RELEASE
2003

On one hand, lightsabers are the perfect videogame weapons. Their omni-directional cutting power makes them capable of the kind of flourishes animators wish real swords could make, they provide their own visuals and sound, and there's no need to overlay flashy particle effects when your weapon *is* a flashy particle effect.

On the other hand, that infinitely sharp blade is a nightmare to design combat encounters for. It only takes a single decent blow from an actual sword to convince an enemy that falling over and bleeding to death is probably in their best interests. A lightsaber? It's all over the first time someone misses a parry, or accidentally cuts their own arms off.

That's why we've been conditioned to accept that in videogame Star Wars, lightsabers are just hitpoint-whittling glowsticks. Excuses are made – rare ores that resist lightsaber blades, personal shield generators that allow stormtroopers to take a beating – but the reality is that games are unwilling to address the problem of an infinitely sharp weapon. The latter *Dark Forces* games, from *Jedi Outcast* onwards, are the few games that attempt to do lightsabers right. *Academy*, the final game in the series, was made in only a year and in most areas – particularly first-person shooting – did very little to advance the basic mechanics of the *Quake 3* engine-powered *Outcast*. What it did do, and the reason it's worth revisiting, is comprehensively upgrade *JK2*'s already-impressive lightsaber combat system.

Cutting edge

Outcast established the basic model: third-person saber swinging where the movement of the mouse dictates the direction of the blade. It also introduced strong, medium and light saber stances as well as the moves for each. *Academy* takes that baton and runs with it, adding special moves, dual-wielding, double-bladed lightsabers, and such acrobatic abilities as wall-runs, backflips and rolls that scale with the level of your Force powers. On all but the highest difficulty settings you only need to land a single decent hit to eliminate most foes, but how you go about it is up to you.

Set ten years after *Return of the Jedi*, *Academy* is the first game in the series to boot regular protagonist Kyle Katarn to a supporting role. Instead, you're his apprentice: a young Jedi called Jaden Korr who can be male or female and one of several races. After a short series of tutorial missions, assignments come in batches of five that you can complete in any order. Finish enough and further story missions unlock: there's a touch of BioWare to the game's structure, reinforced by the customisable protagonist and the fact that the female main character is voiced by Jennifer 'Commander Shepard' Hale.

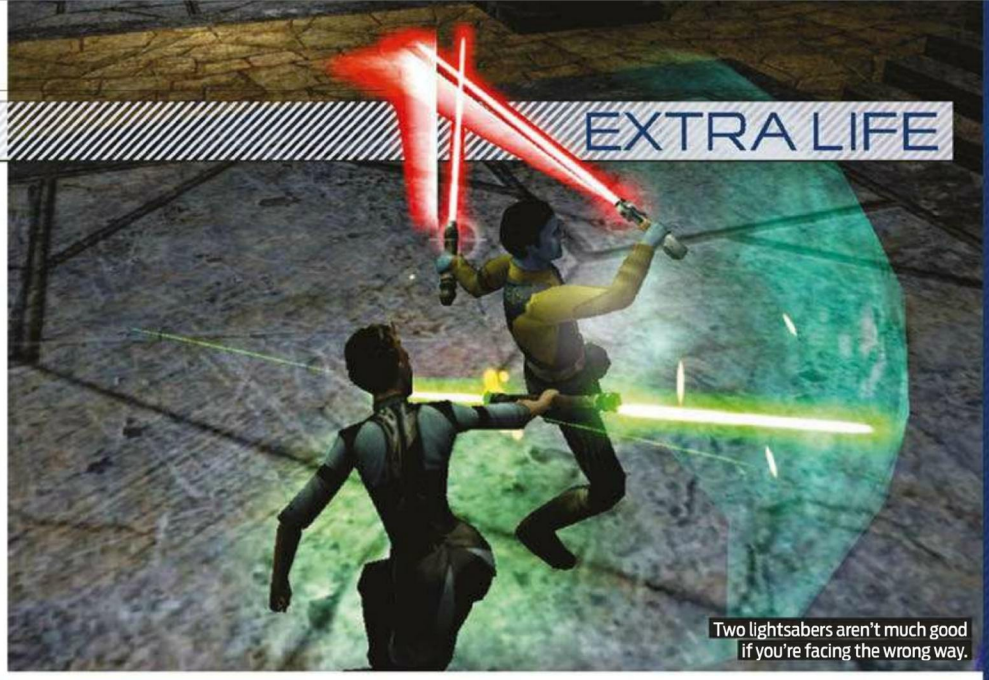
CHRIS SAYS...
"It's OK to quickload if your combat moves aren't stylish enough."

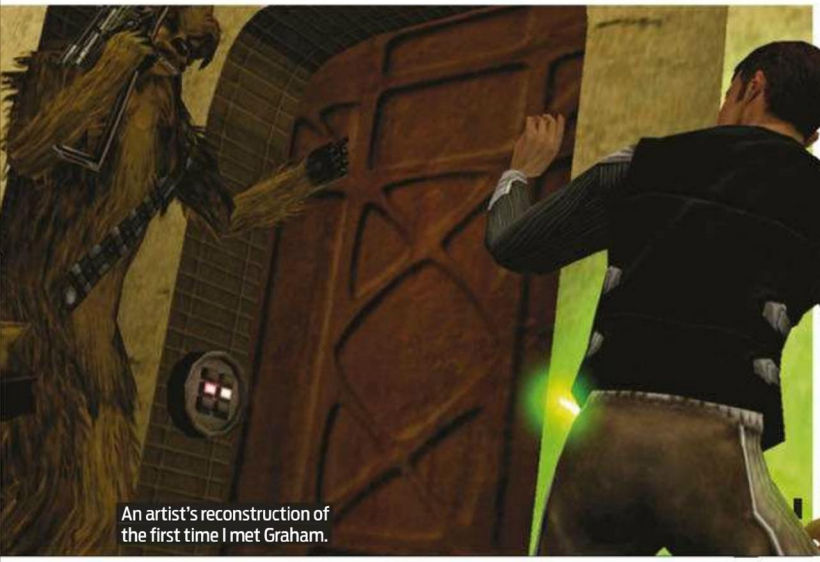
Returning to *Jedi Academy*, what impresses about the narrative is the fine line it treads between pastiche and establishing its own direction. For a standalone story, there are an improbable number of cameos – you'll earn Luke Skywalker's respect, become Chewbacca's mate, and make Boba Fett nod appreciatively – but they're handled well and don't feel gratuitous. The villains are a Sith cult haring around the galaxy absorbing dark side energy from sites where Luke Skywalker has felt a strong connection to the Force. This provides a reason to send you to iconic areas such as Tatooine and Hoth that's a

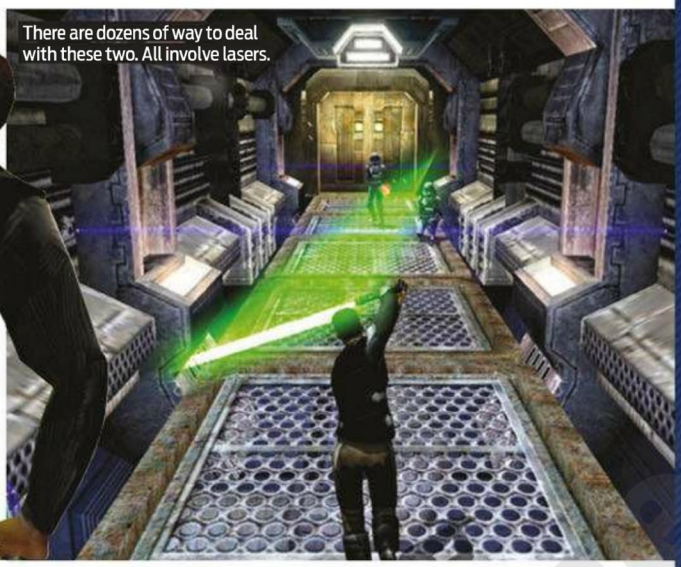
WorldMags.net

Claiming the high ground is overrated.

Tauntauns: the sleeping bag you can ride.


Two lightsabers aren't much good if you're facing the wrong way.


An artist's reconstruction of the first time I met Graham.


There are dozens of way to deal with these two. All involve lasers.

little more honest than most Star Wars games, which shrug their shoulders at the absurdity of every major event in the history of the galaxy taking place on the same backwater desert planet.

Most missions are a linear combat gauntlet broken up by puzzles, of the 'how do I reach that switch? Oh right, I can control things with my mind' variety. Some provide a little more freedom of movement, challenging you to meet a certain set of objectives in a larger area. Others throw out the normal mechanics entirely for a swoop-bike chase or sandworm-evading hike across the desert. For the most part, though, you'll be given a place to go, a corridor to run down to get there, and a range of blaster and lightsaber-wielding enemies to obliterate.

Point taken

The most common criticism of *Jedi Academy* is that it isn't very hard. This is true: your lightsaber really is an infinitely sharp blade, and it doesn't take much to eliminate the majority of foes. When you add the ability to speed yourself up into a bullet-time blur, Force push people dozens of feet through the air, and mind-trick enemies into killing each other, you start to wonder why Raven even bothered including traditional blasters.

STYLE GUIDE Three of *Academy*'s most useful – and flashiest – moves

SLASH BACK
S + LMB *with back to enemy*
This attack can only be done when the enemy is behind you, but it's hard to counter and that makes it useful in multiplayer. This can lead to some strange situations, with players running at each other backwards in an attempt to land the blow.

DUAL SABER BARRIER
LMB, RMB *in quick succession*
Dual saber players can crouch and use the Force to spin their blades around like a whirlwind. Despite the name this actually leaves you quite exposed – but it can act like a smartbomb if you're dropped into a room full of distracted enemies.

KICK
RMB *+ direction*
Why elegantly dice someone when you can kick them in the head? Useful for knocking players down or off ledges when on Force-restricted servers, kick is only available to saber-staff wielders. Yelling "THIS. IS. [insert hometown here]" is optional.

The game is best enjoyed with the understanding that success isn't about simply killing everyone in the room: it's about killing everyone in the room in the most elaborate way possible. It's about style and mastery: chaining wall-runs into twirling aerial combos, lightsaber throws, and bursts of lethal violence. *Jedi Academy* is a scoring system away from being *Tony Hawk's Pro Laser Dismemberment*, and while it's a shame that it doesn't formally acknowledge stylish play, if you're returning after eight years you know what you're coming back for.

In order to do justice to a weapon as dangerous as a lightsaber it's necessary to make a combat system that's more about misses than it is about hits. *Jedi Academy* doesn't solve this problem, but ignores it in a way that respects the fundamentals of the fiction. The fact that there are still people playing it online, making mods and enjoying the fantasy proves that giving players a broad range of options with which to express themselves – even if they don't need to use them to succeed – can be preferable to providing a meticulously scripted experience, or designing systems that are balanced but stifle creative play.

WorldMags.net

The greatest games on PC

GO TO WAR...

SHOGUN 2: FALL OF THE SAMURAI

The first full expansion for our strategy game of 2011 asks an important question: what happens when you bring a sword to a cannon fight? The answer: bad things.

totalwar.com/shogun2

ALSO *StarCraft II, Dawn of War II, Supreme Commander 2, Company of Heroes*

HAVE AN ADVENTURE...

MASS EFFECT 3

The final act of BioWare's long-running space opera is the phenomenal send-off we were hoping for. Gather your allies, pack your biggest gun, and face down the Reapers once and for all.

masseffect.com

ALSO *Deus Ex: Human Revolution, Skyrim, The Witcher 2, Fallout 3*

SHOOT MEN...

BATTLEFIELD 3

DICE's bombastic shooter still impresses with its scale, powerful feedback, and detailed loadout customisation. Each match is a dozen different games in one, from infantry combat to armoured warfare.

battlefield.com

ALSO *Modern Warfare 3, Stalker: Call of Pripyat, Red Orchestra 2, Just Cause 2, Left 4 Dead 2*

GET SOMETHING FOR NOTHING...

TRIBES: ASCEND

We've developed a bit of an obsession with Hi-Rez's latest. It's a skill-based shooter that rewards teamwork, map knowledge and stylish play like no other. It's got jetpacks, and it's free. What are you waiting for?

tribesascend.com

ALSO *League of Legends, TrackMania Nations Forever, Spelunky, N*

LEAD A SECOND LIFE...

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

The 'Legacy' update has added an array of bonuses for veteran players, including new character creation options. Now is the ideal time to get stuck in.

swtor.com

ALSO *World of Warcraft, EVE Online, Lord of the Rings Online, DC Universe Online*

PLAY ON YOUR NETBOOK...

PLANTS VS ZOMBIES

To be fair, you can play *Plants vs Zombies* on almost anything. But its accessibility and lane-based tower defence make it ideal for a netbook's small trackpad – and it's funny to boot.

popcap.com/games/plants-vs-zombies/pc

ALSO *Monkey Island 2 SE, Peggle, Bookworm Adventures, World of Goo, Braid*

PLAY SOMETHING INDIE...

MINECRAFT

If Mojang mined out all their awards, they'd have enough gold to build, well, a single enormous award. If you're not playing the PC's premier build-'em-up, you should be. Watch out for creepers.

minecraft.net

ALSO *Limbo, VVVVVV, AudioSurf, SpaceChem, Super Meat Boy, Magicka*

FLY, DRIVE AND RIDE...

F1 2011

Show them how the pros do it in the definitive version of Codemasters' F1 racing series. Hop in for a few laps or commit to a career of full-length endurance races – or recruit a friend for co-op championships.

formula1-game.com

ALSO *Flight Simulator X, Silent Hunter 4, Race Driver Grid, DiRT 3, Burnout Paradise*

PWN SOME NOOBS...

STARCRAFT II

It's the darling of the e-sports community for a reason. Don't be put off by the learning curve: there are a wealth of resources available to help you crack the world's premier competitive strategy game.

battle.net

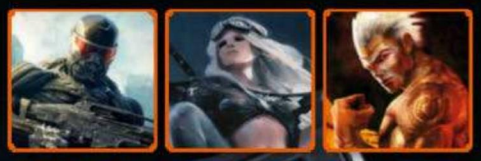
ALSO *Counter-Strike: Source, Unreal Tournament III, Team Fortress 2, FIFA 12*

WorldMags.net

FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART
ImagineFX PRESENTS

HOW TO DRAW AND PAINT

GAME ART



CREATE KILLER CONCEPT ART

Discover how to design dynamic character art for video games

FREE DISC!
VIDEO WORKSHOPS & BRUSHES!

18 GAME ART WORKSHOPS

Learn new concept art skills in Painter, Photoshop and SketchUp

PAINT AMAZING DIGITAL ART

Step-by-step tutorials from the artists behind Uncharted 3, Batman: Arkham City, Star Wars: The Old Republic and more!

GET YOUR COPY TODAY

WHSmith • Barnes & Noble • £7.99

ORDER ONLINE: www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/ifx-draw-and-paint

worldmags.net

BUY MY GAME! GUNPOINTGAME.COM

PC GAMER

WOW HE'S GREAT!

TOM FRANCIS MAKES GAME!

Streams crossed. Journalists confused.

Found this to be sent to the printers. Apparently it had "accidentally" slipped into the folder. Keep an eye on Tom. He's sneaky.

GABE LOVES IT!

Probably. You don't know.

UNPARALLELED ACCESS! (TO ME)

GUNPOINT

The saviour of PC gaming (for realsies this time)

"YOU'RE PLAYING IT WRONG!"

Stop playing it wrong!

10 Greatest ways to buy Gunpoint

SEND ME YOUR BANK ACCOUNT DETAILS!

EXTRA LIFE

HONEST REVIEWS WHY NOT

GUNPOINT
GUNPOINT DLC
GUNPOINT SPECIAL EDITION
AND NOTHING ELSE

£5.99 05

Next month!

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE WEDNESDAY MAY 9

FEATURES...

- A MASSIVE EXCLUSIVE REVEAL
- THE BEST LAPTOP GAMES, EVER!
- INSIDE DIABLO 3
- A SECRET NEW FPS!

PREVIEWED...

- ASSASSIN'S CREED 3
- HITMAN: ABSOLUTION
- GUILD WARS 2
- PROTOTYPE 2

PLUS...

- MASS EFFECT 3 ON TRIAL
- THE WEIRD FUTURE OF THE FPS
- A FREE GIFT!

AND SOME REVIEWS >> RIDGE RACER: UNBOUNDED >> RISEN 2: DARK WATERS >> MEN OF WAR: CONDEMNED HEROES >> ORION: DINO BEATDOWN >> MORE...

DinoPC.com

0844 999 4123

Select your BEAST!

Gallant AMD 4100

AMD FX 4100 Black Edition
Gigabyte 880GM-USB3 Motherboard
Windows 7 Home Premium 64-bit
8GB DDR3 RAM
NVIDIA GeForce GTX 550 Ti 1GB
500GB S-ATAIII HDD
Xigmatek Case + Xigmatek PSU

£479
inc. VAT

Alioramus 2500K OC @ 4.5Ghz

Intel Core i5 2500K @ 4.5Ghz
Gigabyte Z68AP-D3 Motherboard
Windows 7 Home Premium 64-bit
4GB DDR3 RAM
ATI Radeon HD 6870 1GB
60GB S-ATAIII SSD + 500GB S-ATAIII
Zalman Z9 Case + Xigmatek PSU

£709
inc. VAT

Evolution 2600K OC @ 4.7Ghz

Intel Core i7 2600K @ 4.7Ghz
Gigabyte Z68X-UD5 Motherboard
Windows 7 Home Premium 64-bit
16GB DDR3 Corsair 1600Mhz RAM
NVIDIA GeForce GTX 590 3GB
60GB S-ATAIII SSD + 1TB Caviar Black
Corsair 600T + Corsair 850W HX

£1,799
inc. VAT

Watercooled!

FREE One Week Priority Turnaround **Use Discount Code DSC1WPG**

Powered By XIGMATEK CORSAIR GIGABYTE

WorldMags.net

CORSAIR®
corsair.com

INTRODUCING CORSAIR

VENGEANCE™

GAMING PERIPHERALS

Vengeance K60
FPS GAMING KEYBOARD

Vengeance M60
FPS GAMING MOUSE

Vengeance K90
MMO/RTS GAMING KEYBOARD

Vengeance M90
MMO/RTS GAMING MOUSE

Designed for *performance gaming*

The new Corsair® Vengeance™ line of elite gaming mice and keyboards bring your gaming to the highest level of performance. These are not typical gaming devices. Each has been designed for incredible responsiveness and precise accuracy with customizable, reliable controls. Our attention to the smallest details and the highly crafted refinements makes all the difference.

Performance Optimized Gaming Keyboards
Gamers need so much more from their keyboards. Vengeance K90 and K60 were designed to exceed the expectations of even the most dedicated gamer. With Cherry MX Red mechanical keyswitches, 100% anti-ghosting, and 20-key rollover over USB, you'll take your gaming to a whole new level. The K90 includes 18 programmable macro keys and individually backlit keys, and the K60 has a padded wrist rest and contoured and textured WASD keycaps.

High Precision Gaming Mice
With a 5700-dpi sensor that can be adjusted on the fly, programmable sensor lift, a weighted scroll wheel, and premium aluminum unibody construction, the Vengeance M90 and M60 feel great in your hand and deliver precise control to elevate your game. The M90 has 15 intelligently positioned buttons including nine programmable macro buttons, and the M60 has an adjustable center-of-gravity and a dedicated sniper button for maximum aiming accuracy.

facebook.com/VengeanceGaming

@CorsairMemory

To learn lots more about the complete line of Vengeance gaming peripherals, visit corsair.com

dabs.com ebuyer.com OcUK OVERCLOCKERS UK SCAN computers

WorldMags.net